

**TÜRKİYE’S POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE MIGRATION ERA:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MIGRATION POLICIES OF PARTIES ESTABLISHED
AFTER 2017**

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Abstract: Following the large-scale displacement of Syrians after 2011 and the rise in irregular migration flows, migration has become a central theme in political discourse in Türkiye. This study argues that the politicization of migration has entered a new phase with the emergence of newly established political parties after the transition to the presidential system in 2017, which have allocated a special place to migration policies in their programs. Some of these parties have framed migration not merely as a policy issue but as a foundational component of their institutional identity. Two main dynamics underlie this development: First, the increasing public and political debate around migration movements that Türkiye has faced in recent years, which show tendencies toward permanence. Second, the structural changes in Türkiye’s political system. Based on qualitative content analysis, this research examines the migration policies of six political parties founded after the system change, focusing on three principal axes: (I) the framing of migration as a national security threat, (II) citizenship policies concerning Syrians under temporary protection, and (III) return/repatriation strategies (diplomatic, voluntary, or coercive models). The findings reveal that migration has evolved into a strategic political instrument in Türkiye, shaping voter mobilization, party identity formation, and the structuring of political alliances.

Keywords: *Migration, Politicization, Presidential system, Syrians in Türkiye, Migration policies.*

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GÖÇ ÇAĞINDA TÜRKİYE’NİN SİYASİ PARTİLERİ:

2017 SONRASI KURULAN PARTİLERİN GÖÇ POLİTİKALARININ ANALİZİ

Öz: 2011 sonrası Suriye kaynaklı kitlesel göç ve artan düzensiz göç hareketleri, Türkiye’de göç konusunu siyasal söylemin merkezine taşımıştır. Bu çalışma, 2017’de Başkanlık sistemine geçişin ardından kurulan ve programlarında göç politikalarına özel bir yer ayıran yeni siyasal partilerle birlikte, göçün siyasallaşmasının yeni bir evreye girdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Bu partilerden bazıları, göçü yalnızca bir politika başlığı olarak değil, kurumsal kimliklerinin temel unsurlarından biri olarak yapılandırmaktadır. Bu gelişmenin temelinde iki ana dinamik bulunmaktadır: Birincisi, Türkiye’nin son yıllarda karşı karşıya kaldığı ve kalıcılığa eğilimi gösteren göç hareketlerinin kamuoyunda ve siyasal alanda artan biçimde tartışılmasıdır. İkincisi ise, Türkiye’deki siyasal sistem değişiklikleridir. Nitel içerik analizine dayanan bu araştırma, sistem değişimi sonrasında kurulan altı partinin göç politikalarının benzerlik ve farklılıklarını üç temel eksen üzerinden incelemektedir: (I) göçün ulusal güvenlik tehdidi olarak çerçevelenmesi, (II) geçici koruma altındaki Suriyelilere ilişkin vatandaşlık politikaları ve (III) geri dönüş stratejileri (diplomatik, gönüllü veya zorlayıcı modeller). Elde edilen bulgular, göçün Türkiye siyasetinde seçmen mobilizasyonu, parti kimliği inşası ve siyasal ittifakların şekillenmesinde etkili, stratejik bir araç haline geldiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Göç, Siyasallaşma, Başkanlık sistemi, Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler, Göç politikaları.*

Introduction²

With the changes in the electoral system following the transition to a presidential system of government, political parties have prioritized alliance politics considering the lowering of the national electoral threshold to 7 % and the difficulty in securing the 50 % +1 vote required for the presidential election. Many newly formed political parties, considered small in terms of voting share, have gained importance due to the alliance requirements of the new system. This situation, along with the politicization of migration debates, has increased the possibility of migration-oriented “*boutique/niche parties*” gaining power.³ The migration policies of the new political parties established during and after the transition to the presidential system of government are important because they have the potential to determine alliance relations, electoral outcomes, and the power structure in Türkiye.

Recently, research on the migration policies of political parties in Türkiye has increased. Tuğsuz and Yılmaz, as well as Ceylan and Uslu, examined the migration policies of political parties through the election atmosphere and election manifestos in 2015.⁴ İçduygu examined the process in the context of politicization, investigating the determinants of the politicization of migration processes in Türkiye over the recent period.⁵ Yanaşmayan et al. emphasized that political parties used the “*refugee card*” in a limited way to address the growing social, economic, and cultural grievances of their constituents in Türkiye between 2014 and 2018.⁶ Yolcu and Cin et al. focus on the parliamentary activities and migration policies of political parties.⁷ Ceylan, on the other hand, analyzes different migration patterns in post-Cold War

² This research is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation titled “Effects of the Changing Structure of Migration Towards Turkey after 1990 on the Migration Policies of Political Parties”.

³ Ahmet Ceylan & İsa Uslu & Leman İncedere (2025), “Immigration Debates in Recent Turkish Politics and the Victory Party as an Example of an Anti-Immigrant Niche Party”, *Recent Period Turkish Studies*, 47, pp. 50-71; Murat Erdoğan (2020), “Onuncu Yılında Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler”, *Global Panorama*, Date of Accession: 11.11.2024 from <https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2020/04/29/onuncu-yilinda-turkiyedeki-suriyeliler/>; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye’de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*, Ankara: Nobel Yayınları.

⁴ Nigar Tuğsuz & Ayşenur Yılmaz (2015), “Siyasi Partilerin Mülteci Politikaları”, *SETA Perspektif*, 105, Date of Accession: 30.01.2025 from <https://www.setav.org/perspektif/siyasi-partilerin-multeci-politikalari>; Ahmet Ceylan & İsa Uslu (2019), “7 Haziran 2015 Genel Seçimlerinde Partilerin Uluslararası Göç Yaklaşımları Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı İnceleme”, *Sosyal Bilimler Araştırma Dergisi*, 8(1), pp. 97-114.

⁵ Ahmet İçduygu (2017), “Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: ‘Siyasallaşan’ Bir Sürecin Analizi”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, 140, p. 30.

⁶ Zeynep Yanaşmayan & Ayşen Üstübcü & Zeynep Kaşlı (2019), “Under the Shadow of Civilizationist Populist Discourses: Political Debates on Refugees in Turkey”, *New Diversities*, 21(2), pp. 37-51.

⁷ Tuğba Yolcu (2018), “Türkiye’deki Muhalefet Partilerinin Göç Sorununa Yaklaşımlarına Yönelik İçerik Analizi”, *Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 5(14), pp. 678-695; Cigdem Kentmen-Cin, Selçuk Sunay & Nazlı Ece Baltepe (2025), “Framing of Syrian Refugees in Turkish Politics: An Analysis of Turkish Grand National Assembly Debates”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, January, pp. 1-15.

Türkiye.⁸ According to Ceylan, not only daily political reasons but also historical background are important in the formation of migration policies of political parties. However, the existing literature tends to focus predominantly on traditional political parties and those represented in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM).

This study examines the increasing politicization of migration in Türkiye and investigates how this process has evolved in the context of newly established political parties formed after the transition to a presidential system. The central research question of the study is whether migration policies have become a defining element of these parties' institutional identities and political positions. In this respect, the study aims to make an original contribution to existing literature. Moreover, the study aims to identify the similarities and differences in the migration policies of these parties by examining them through three key axes (security discourses, approaches to citizenship, and return strategies), thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of the politicization of migration in Türkiye.

Within the framework of the limitations of the research, the sample group examined within the framework of the limitations of the research included Good Party (İYİ Parti) founded in 2017, New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah Partisi/YRP) founded in 2018, Future Party (Gelecek Partisi/GP) founded in 2019, Democracy And Progress Party (DEVA) founded in 2020, Homeland Party (Memleket Partisi/MP) founded in 2021, and Victory Party (Zafer Partisi/ZP) founded in 2021. Following the 2018 general elections, the Good Party (İYİ Parti) was the only new political party that was able to secure representation in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM). Moreover, the party's significant role in Türkiye's new political context, based on electoral alliances, was the primary reason for examining the party.⁹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as Foreign Minister of the Republic of Türkiye at the beginning of the migration movement and subsequently became Prime Minister in September 2014, remained in

⁸ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri", Ph.D. Thesis, Ege University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, İzmir, Türkiye; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye'de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

⁹ Between 2002 and 2007, the Motherland Party (ANAP) gained representation by forming parliamentary groups at various times, with the participation of deputies who had left the AK Parti and the CHP. However, this was an exceptional case and could not be maintained due to the general elections. On the other hand, ANAP has been a continuous institutional structure since 1983 (Milliyet, 14.04.2007). In this respect, the party differed from the peculiarities of the Good Party. One of the political parties that gained representation in the TBMM by forming a group because of a general election was the HDP. The party, founded in 2012 and first allowed to be represented in the TBMM by establishing a group following the June 7, 2015, general election, possesses characteristics that can be considered representative of a distinct political tradition in terms of its personnel, organization, and political line. Since the party can be considered among the continuity parties of a political tradition that is currently represented in the TBMM, the party was excluded from the analysis in the context of parties formed during the migration period.

this position until May 2016. Davutoğlu's decisive position in the process formed the basis for the Future Party's investigation. Similarly, DEVA, whose founding leader was Ali Babacan, who served as Deputy Prime Minister between 2009 and 2015 and held various government positions for 13 years between 2002 and 2015 during the AK Parti governments, was included in the analysis. Babacan's position as Minister of State for the Economy and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the AK Parti governments, as well as Deputy Prime Minister in the cabinet during the first four years of the migration movement, are important in analyzing the party's approaches. The unique importance of the YRP within the People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) and the remarkable number of votes it received in the March 2024 local elections provided the basis for analyzing this party's migration policy. Similarly, the unique importance of the Homeland Party (MP), and in particular the Victory Party (ZP) in Turkish political life, as well as the significance they attach to migration policy, are the reasons why these parties are included in the research.

1. International Migration Debates in Western European Countries and A Theoretical Review

Since the early 1970s, migration has been a priority issue in various European countries. The 1973 OPEC oil crisis and its aftermath sparked debates about the future of migrants in European countries. The first step was to halt the acceptance of new migrants. Subsequently, incentives for return policies were developed. For example, return migration was encouraged in France in the 1970s and 1980s and in Germany in 1983. During this process, the anti-immigration discourse of political parties and proposals advocating for the return of migrants gained strength.¹⁰ On the other hand, the issue of migration was also addressed from a human rights perspective by the Supreme Courts, some civil society organizations, and various social democratic political parties in European countries. Migration movements continued during this period in the context of family reunification and irregular migration.

Migration debates have been at the forefront of the political agenda in many countries, with varying approaches. The economy, public security, social cohesion, and cultural concerns have been at the center of these debates.¹¹ These debates on migration and the integration of migrants into various European countries have become the primary policy area of

¹⁰ Nermin Abadan-Unat (2017), *Bitmeyen Göç*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları; Ayhan Kaya (2016), *Islam, Migration and Integration in the Age of Securitization*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

¹¹ Jef Huysmans (2000), "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 38(5), pp. 751-777.

radical/populist/extremist political parties in these countries. In some cases, the fact that certain political parties have focused almost exclusively on migration has allowed them to be characterized as single-issue/niche parties with a primary focus on migration.¹²

The fact that the issue of migration has been on the agenda of European countries since the 1970s has led to debates on migration and politicization in the literature. The fact that an issue gains a social presence and becomes an agenda item in the public opinion of a country, within the framework of different approaches, is one of the important indicators of the politicization tendency of the relevant issue. The attitudes of political actors that can be evaluated within the framework of different approaches, the fact that the issue is on the political agenda in the context of divisions, and the debates on the issue in election campaigns stand out as various features that can be observed within the framework of politicization.¹³ According to Van der Brug, politicization occur through two distinct processes. Politicization can occur at the grassroots level through civil society and citizens, or from the top through the dominance of institutions or authority.¹⁴ In academic discussions, the reasons for the politicization of the migration phenomenon are generally discussed within the framework of various factors, such as the number of migrant groups, approaches to migrants' adaptation processes, and the policies of political parties. Recently, the relationship between migration and politicization in various European countries has been explored within the context of border security, integration debates, and the influence of far-right politics on the policies of center parties.¹⁵ The view that mainstream center-right parties are more effective than far-right political movements in politicizing these debates is another prominent approach in the literature.¹⁶ Economic, ethnic, religious, and cultural issues are other prominent themes in politicization debates.¹⁷ In addition to these themes, Ceylan, states that the main polarization areas in the country can be reproduced through the migration movement, and politicization gains strength.¹⁸

¹² Cas Mudde (1999), "The Single-Issue Party Thesis: Extreme Right Parties and the Immigration Issue", *West European Politics*, 22(3), pp. 182-197.

¹³ Wouter van der Brug & Gianni D'Amato & Didier Ruedin & Joost Berkhout (2015), *The Politicisation of Migration*, London: Routledge, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Wouter van der Brug et al. (2015), *The Politicisation of Migration*.

¹⁵ Edgar Grande & Tobias Schwarzbözl & Matthias Fatke (2018), "Politicizing Immigration in Western Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(10), p. 1445.

¹⁶ Sarah Meyer & Sieglinde Rosenberger (2015), "Just a Shadow? The Role of Radical Right Parties in the Politicization of Immigration, 1995–2009", *Politics and Governance*, 3(2), pp. 1-17.

¹⁷ Pietro Castelli Gattinara & Laura Morales (2017), "The Politicization and Securitization of Migration in Western Europe: Public Opinion, Political Parties and the Immigration Issue", in Philippe Bourbeau (ed.) *Handbook of Migration and Security*, Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, pp. 273-276.

¹⁸ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri".

Since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the securitization approach has gained strength in migration debates. As a result of the 9/11 attacks, the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, and the politically motivated murders in the Netherlands, the issue of migration began to be addressed from a security perspective in many European countries. Islamophobia has been at the center of these discussions.¹⁹ Far-right parties, using a securitized discourse language, have addressed the issue of migration with various words and figures of speech, such as “invasion”, “influx”, “attack”, and “occupation” in some cases coming to the fore with approaches that dehumanize migrant groups.²⁰ The fact that these parties have reached a level where they can pull the migration policies of centrist parties into a restrictive orbit, given the vote shares they have achieved, is another issue of debate for Western democracies.²¹

2. Immigration And Politicization in Türkiye

From the 17th century onward, the Ottoman Empire was confronted with large-scale immigration processes driven by retreat and decline. After the failed Second Siege of Vienna in 1683, the Ottomans for the first time directed and managed the movement of emigrants from the frontier provinces. The empire also established various institutions to manage the mass and continuous migration processes during these periods.²² The Republic of Türkiye encouraged and accepted the migration of Turkish ancestors and culture within the framework of the search for a homogeneous society, in line with the spirit of the new nation-state being created. Between 1923 and 1990, Türkiye primarily welcomed migrants of Turkish origin and culture. Although there were various debates regarding the management of these migrations, there were no fundamental disagreements regarding the acceptance of these migrations.²³

As a result of the collapse of the USSR, structural problems in the former Eastern Bloc countries, and instability in Türkiye’s neighboring countries, the migratory flows received by Türkiye after 1990 began to diversify. On the other hand, the rapid development and termination

¹⁹ Chris Allen (2010), *Islamophobia*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 83-84; Alexander Betts (2017), *Zorunlu Göç ve Küresel Politika*, Ankara: Hece Yayınları, p. 103.

²⁰ Jef Huysmans (2000), “The European Union and the Securitization of Migration”, p. 769; Nazif Mandacı & Gökay Özerim (2013), “Uluslararası Göçlerin Bir Güvenlik Konusuna Dönüşümü: Avrupa’da Radikal Sağ Partiler ve Göçün Güvenlikleştirilmesi”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 10(39), pp. 108, 113.

²¹ Joost van Spanje (2010), “Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties’ Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe”, *Party Politics*, 16(5), pp. 563-586; Pietro Castelli Gattinara & Laura Morales (2017), “The Politicization and Securitization of Migration in Western Europe: Public Opinion, Political Parties and the Immigration Issue”, pp. 273-295.

²² H. Yıldırım Ağanoğlu (2011), *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Balkanlar’ın Makus Talihi*, İstanbul: Kum Saati Yayınları, pp. 31-32.

²³ Ahmet İçduygu & Sema Erder & Ömer Faruk Gençkaya (2014), “Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Göç Politikaları, 1923-2023: Ulus-Devlet Oluşumundan Ulus-Ötesi Dönüşümlere”, Koç Üniversitesi Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi, İstanbul: MİReKOÇ Araştırma Raporları.

of these migratory movements, as well as the fact that they are generally not mass movements and have a strong tendency to return, have not led to politicization. The presence of irregular Armenian migrants and the denial of refugee status to Chechen asylum seekers have occasionally been topics of debate in the country. The presence of migrant women from former Eastern Bloc countries in the Eastern Black Sea region, on the other hand, has led to local politicization.²⁴

The reflection of the events of the Arab Spring on Syria, and the transformation of these developments in Syria into a civil war, have been the main dynamics driving mass migration from Syria to Türkiye. While the issue of Syrians in Türkiye was rapidly politicized following the 2015 general elections, the intensification of the migration trend, uncertainties, and citizenship debates had already given rise to pioneering debates on the issue as early as 2013 and 2014.²⁵ Beginning in 2013, representatives of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in the TBMM began to raise concerns about the acquisition of citizenship and possible voting rights for Syrians in Türkiye. They wanted to know the number of Syrians eligible to vote in the March 30, 2014, local government elections and the June 7, 2015, general elections.²⁶ The emphasis on coexistence and permanence, which was first discussed by senior representatives of the ruling party in 2014, was one of the first debates.²⁷

In 2014 and 2015, four electoral processes and debates significantly contributed to the politicization of the issue.²⁸ The June 7, 2015, general election was the first time Syrians in Türkiye were included in manifestos during the general election process and discussed within the framework of differentiating views in political discourse. In fact, all of the political parties that gained representation in the Turkish Grand National Assembly as a result of the elections devoted space in their election manifestos to the issue of Syrians in Türkiye. The Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) has publicly stated that the current policy is humanitarian and conscientious and that the process will continue with similar policies.²⁹ However, in the election

²⁴ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri".

²⁵ Ahmet İçduygu (2017), "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: 'Siyasallaşan' Bir Sürecin Analizi", *Toplum ve Bilim*, 140.

²⁶ *Milliyet* (2013), "Seçimlerde Oy Kullanacaklar mı?", 19.08.2013, Date of Accession: 12.09.2024 from <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/secimlerde-oy-kullanacaklar-mi-1751799>.

²⁷ Yeşim Özer (2015), *Türkiye ve Fransa Örnekleriyle Uluslararası Göç ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı*, İstanbul: Derin Yayınları; Murat Erdoğan (2018), *Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler: Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

²⁸ Ahmet İçduygu (2017), "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: 'Siyasallaşan' Bir Sürecin Analizi", *Toplum ve Bilim*, 140, p. 38.

²⁹ Justice and Development Party (2015), <https://www.akparti.org.tr/parti/dosya-arsivi/>, Date of Accession: 11.10.2024.

manifestos and statements of the CHP and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the issue was addressed with critical approaches towards the ruling party, and statements emerged that the Syrians in Türkiye would be repatriated.³⁰ The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which gained the opportunity to be represented in the Turkish Grand National Assembly after the relevant elections, addressed the migration process in a liberal context. With its proposal for citizenship in the migration process, the HDP adopted a policy that differed from both the ruling and opposition parties.³¹ During November 1, 2015, general elections, political parties continued to emphasize Syrians in Türkiye.³²

According to İçduygu, the readmission agreement signed between the European Union and Türkiye, in parallel with the intense migration movements in the summer of 2015 played a significant role in the politicization of the issue. Another significant political development that emerged during the politicization process was President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's citizenship proposal on July 2, 2016. Erdoğan's proposal to grant citizenship to Syrians in Türkiye strengthened the politicization tendency of the issue within the framework of a differentiated approach among political parties.³³ After the military coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the debate on citizenship receded into the background. The debate resurfaced with President Erdoğan's declaration that highly qualified Syrians would be granted citizenship.³⁴ The related debate remains ongoing and continues to have a significant presence in political life.

During the referendum on April 16, 2017, and the subsequent general and local elections, the discussion about Syrians in Türkiye was among the top priorities on the agenda. Both the space allocated to the issue by political parties in their election manifestos and the assessments of political elites on the issue through discourse have been among the key factors in the politicization of the process. In general, the issue has developed as a field of political debate between the ruling and opposition parties, including foreign policy, concerns about sociological change, citizenship policy, voting rights, and the economy. Politicization can extend beyond the debate that is strongly featured in the election manifestos of political parties and can

³⁰ Republican People's Party (2015), <https://www.chp.org.tr/yayinlar/secim-bildirgeleri>, Date of Accession: 12.09.2024; Nationalist Action Party (2015),

https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/bevanname/mhp/mhp_bevannamesi.html, Date of Accession: 23.10.2024.

³¹ Peoples' Democratic Party (2015), <https://www.hdp.org.tr/tr/secim-materyalleri/5423>, Date of Accession: 04.08.2020.

³² Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri".

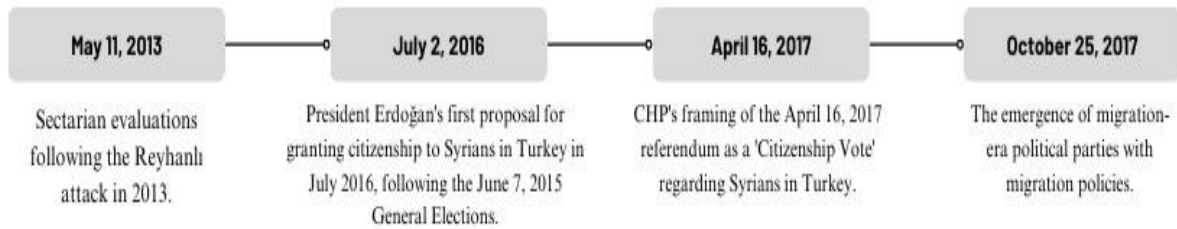
³³ Ahmet İçduygu (2017), "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: 'Siyasallaşan' Bir Sürecin Analizi", *Toplum ve Bilim*, 140, pp. 37, 40.

³⁴ Gülay Uğur Göksel (2018), *Göçmen Entegrasyonu ve Tanınma Teorisi: 'Adil Entegrasyon'*, İstanbul: Pinhan Yayınları, p. 186.

manifest itself with a frequency that cannot be evaluated periodically. The issue of Syrians in Türkiye has gained prominence in current political debates, drawing on historical context, public visibility, Arabic signs, and demographic sensitivities.³⁵

While Türkiye's cross-border military operations and news of conflicts may put Syrians in Türkiye on the main agenda, images of Syrians crossing into Syria during holidays, or sometimes images of Syrians celebrating or vacationing in Syria, may become the main topic of discussion in the country. The aforementioned debate often enters the political agenda and is addressed within the framework of divergent views. This situation can also be observed in the programs of political parties that have recently gained institutional identity and started to operate.³⁶

Figure I. Stages of the Politicization of Immigration in Türkiye³⁷



The fact that political parties that have gained institutional identity in Türkiye in recent years have included the issue of migration among the country's most important agenda items constitutes a new dimension of politicization. Newly established political parties are including the issue of migration among their primary concerns such as education, defense and the economy, and are gaining institutional identity through their political proposals on this issue. Ceylan treats the founding of the Good Party symbolically as a new phase in the stages of politicization.³⁸

3. Methodology

In scientific research, qualitative content analysis is employed to complement the findings of quantitative content analysis, which focuses on explicit content, to capture implicit meaning,

³⁵ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri".

³⁶ Yeşim Özer (2015), *Türkiye ve Fransa Örnekleriyle Uluslararası Göç ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı*, pp. 132-137.

³⁷ This figure was created using data from Ceylan (2022/a), Ceylan (2022/b), and İçduygu (2017).

³⁸ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri"; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye'de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

and to analyze data using a descriptive approach.³⁹ The study focuses on newly established political parties that became eligible to participate in elections after 2017. While the broader research universe includes all such parties, the sample was limited to six parties, selected based on criteria discussed in detail in the introduction.

The party platforms, election manifestos, migration-related reports, and print media archives of the political parties discussed in this study were subjected to content analysis. The materials evaluated in the context of content analysis are generally works produced by people, but not developed with the intention of being the subject of research. This situation requires a systematic analysis of the relevant materials. The aim is to determine the general trend in a particular subject by examining materials that were created independently of each other.⁴⁰ Migration debates in the written texts of political parties were analyzed in detail. Different expressions such as migration, migrant, immigrant, asylum seeker, refugee, temporary protection, and, in the case of Türkiye, Syrians, which have unique meanings in migration research, were identified in party documents. In the content analysis of the party documents, the contextual background was examined using a qualitative approach rather than quantitative repetition. The migration-oriented statements and promises of the parties were analyzed in the context of their policies, informed by the theoretical background. Due to the recent establishment of the political parties and their limited representation in the TBMM, it was not possible to utilize the activities and documents of the TBMM in this research. As an exception to this situation, the analysis of parliamentary questions was utilized under the title of the Good Party. This data source was accessed through the query form for written and oral parliamentary questions in the previous period of the TBMM. As of the date of the doctoral dissertation on which the study is based, the issue of Syrians in Türkiye was analyzed in 198 parliamentary questions submitted by party deputies during the 27th legislative term of the TBMM.⁴¹

In the study, the content of the parliamentary questions was utilized to create the code chart and categories, and to discuss the themes in conjunction with the theoretical background. In order to understand the background of the questions posed by political party representatives within the framework of qualitative content analysis, the position of the political party in the migration movement, the approach in election manifestos, and the theoretical background were included

³⁹ Abdullah Koçak & Özgür Arun (2006), “İçerik Analizi Çalışmalarında Örneklem Sorunu”, *Selçuk İletişim*, 4(3), pp. 21-28; Bruce Berg & Howard Lune (2019), *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemler*, İstanbul: Pearson Yayınları, pp. 353-355.

⁴⁰ Bruce Berg & Howard Lune (2019), *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemler*, pp. 344-345.

⁴¹ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), “1990 Sonrası Türkiye’ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri”.

in the discussion.⁴² The parliamentary questions were analyzed using a standard code structure and thematic analysis.⁴³ The coding process for the parliamentary questions examined in the study was conducted with the support of MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program. To prevent issues such as loss of meaning, the researcher personally conducted the coding process, examining the data item by item and ensuring contextual coherence throughout the theme development process. In this way, the semantic integrity of the data was preserved, enabling a more in-depth content analysis. The themes of economy, citizenship and voting rights, justice and public security, education, the number of Syrians in Türkiye and camps, and health came to the fore in the research.⁴⁴

4. The Emergence of Immigration-Era Political Parties with Immigration Policies

The political parties discussed in this study emerged by incorporating policy proposals on international migration and Syrians into Türkiye in their programs, alongside issues considered fundamental in the country's public opinion, such as education, health, and the economy. Political parties have included migration policies in their programs and have been established by sharing their solutions with the public opinion of the country. This is not only an acknowledgement that the issue of Syrians in Türkiye is seen as one of the main issues of Türkiye, but also a way to address the issue along with its politicized identity.

4.1. The Good Party (İYİ Parti)

The Good Party, founded on October 25, 2017, was one of the pioneering parties established during the migration movement from Syria to Türkiye, incorporating the issue of migration and Syrians in Türkiye into its party program. The party also gave a prominent place in its program to the issue of international migration, which it sees as a deep-rooted problem of Türkiye and shares its proposals for solutions.⁴⁵ The current program of the Good Party, founded in October 2017, consists of eight main topics, with the issue of migration also being addressed in discussions on security. The party's program states that “...it will take measures to prevent changes in the socio-cultural composition of Turkish society by ensuring border security and preventing the entry of military and ideological elements into the country.”⁴⁶ The

⁴² Ibid.; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye’de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

⁴³ Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2022), *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, London: SAGE.

⁴⁴ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), “1990 Sonrası Türkiye’ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri”.

⁴⁵ İYİ Parti (2017), “İYİ Parti Programı”, Date of Accession: 24.09.2024 from https://iyiparti.org.tr/Assets/pdf/iyi_parti_programi.pdf.

⁴⁶ İYİ Parti (2020), “Güncel Parti Programı”, Date of Accession: 24.09.2024 from <https://iyiparti.org.tr/Assets/Upload/iyi-parti-guncel-parti-program.pdf>, p. 34.

aforementioned approach demonstrates that the Good Party addresses the issue of Syrians in Türkiye from a sociological perspective and has concerns in this regard. The party emphasizes sociological change within the framework of a migration approach, parallel to the nation-state's sensitivity. Among the top three issues that emerged in the parliamentary questions on migration submitted by Good Party deputies in the 27th parliamentary term, the issue of possible citizenship and voting rights for Syrians ranked second. This is another result that aligns with the concerns of party officials about the country's changing sociological landscape. On the other hand, the acquisition of the right to vote by this group is viewed as a negative development that may impact the country's politics. The Good Party argued that the migration movement is a strategic plan that can change the population structure in northern Syria as well as Türkiye's borders. The party emphasized the view that the migration movement is an embodiment of the wrong foreign policy of the ruling party, which is supported by foreign powers for strategic reasons, and that a terrorist state is to be established in the region by changing the population structure in northern Syria.⁴⁷ In this respect, the Good Party approaches the issue as a problem of survival from both the internal and international security perspectives.

The general election manifesto of the Good Party, released on 24 June 2018, contained numerous promises regarding Syrians under temporary protection and irregular migration. The Good Party stated that Syrians in Türkiye would be sent to Syria during the month of Ramadan in 2019. The party stated that necessary measures would be taken to prevent new migrations and publicized the development of diplomatic relations with the Syrian state as an election promise.⁴⁸ The Good Party addressed the issue of migration and refugees in the context of public security in its election manifesto prepared for the 31 March 2019 local government elections.⁴⁹ Similarly, in the thematic analysis of the parliamentary questions on migration submitted by Good Party deputies during the 27th parliamentary term, the title "Justice and Public Security" has taken a prominent place. This is another important indicator of the party's assessment of migration in the context of public security.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri"; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye'de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

⁴⁸ İYİ Parti (2018), "Seçim Beyanı", Date of Accession: 24.09.2024 from https://iyiparti.org.tr/assets/pdf/secim_beyani.pdf, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁹ İYİ Parti (2019), "Yerel Seçim Manifestosu", Date of Accession: 24.09.2024 from <https://iyiparti.org.tr/Assets/KurumsalKimlik/YerelSecim/iyiparti2019manifesto.pdf>, p. 53.

⁵⁰ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), "1990 Sonrası Türkiye'ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri"; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye'de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

In December 2019, the Good Party organised a meeting titled Workshop on the Repatriation of Syrian Asylum Seekers. The then leader of the Good Party, Meral Akşener, stated that the party would follow a three-stage plan if it came to power. The plan emphasized that Syrians in Türkiye would not be granted citizenship and that the open-door policy would end.⁵¹ It was stated that Syrians who went to Syria for holidays, trade or other reasons would not be allowed to return to Türkiye.

In September 2022, the Good Party shared its report, entitled “Strategy Document and Action Plan for the National Migration Doctrine”, with the public. The report targeted the ruling party and claimed that Türkiye was deliberately accepting asylum seekers and irregular migrants in order to distort the demographic structure and the nation-state character of Türkiye. The party systematized its migration policy around four principles: border security, return, preventive migration and international consensus on migration.⁵² The Good Party’s election manifesto for the May 14, 2023, general election maintained the approach outlined in the aforementioned report. The party stated that the citizenship policy for immigrant groups characterized as asylum seekers would end and all privileges for this group would be abolished.⁵³

The Good Party has addressed the issue of migration within the framework of the economy and related issues. The first issue that came to the fore in the parliamentary questions on migration submitted by Good Party deputies in the 27th parliamentary term was the economy. In the period analyzed, 53 questions in 11 parliamentary questions submitted by Good Party deputies included concerns about the economic dimension of the issue. The migration movement was assessed as an economic issue under categories, including spending on Syrians in Türkiye, the economic impact of the migration movement on the host society, the allocation of international aid, taxation, and monitoring. Party officials argued that the opportunities offered to Syrians in Türkiye relegated the host community to the position of second-class citizens.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Soner Akın (2020), “Türkiye’deki Siyasal Partilerin Uluslararası Göçe Dair Bakış Açıları ve Avrupa Parlamentosu Siyasi Parti Grupları ile Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz”, in Yakup Bulut & Soner Akın (eds.) *Yerel, Ulusal ve Küresel Boyutlarıyla Göç ve Mülteci Sorunu*, Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, p. 315.

⁵² İYİ Parti (2022), “Strateji Belgesi ve Eylem Planı”, Date of Accession: 24.09.2024 from <https://iyiparti.org.tr/storage/img/content/2vGM/strateji-belgesi-ve-eylem-plani-6-eylul-2022-1-redakte.pdf>.

⁵³ *Sözcü* (2023), “İYİ Parti’nin 3 bin maddelik beyannamesi; Saray, köşk halka açılacak”, 16.04.2023, Date of Accession: 12.10.2024 from <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/son-dakika-iyi-partinin-3-bin-maddelik-beyannamesi-saray-kosk-halka-acilacak-wp7656154>.

⁵⁴ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), “1990 Sonrası Türkiye’ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri”.

4.2. The New Welfare Party (YRP)

In November 2018, the YRP, under the leadership of Fatih Erbakan, established a corporate identity by dedicating a significant portion of its party program to the issues of international migration and Syrians in Türkiye. The party programme states that Türkiye belongs to the category of water-poor countries, with an average of 1652 tons of water per capita, and that this amount has decreased to 1500 tons due to recent migration. The party programme states that Türkiye is home to around five million international migrants, bringing to the forefront the expectation that these migrant groups will return to their countries with the end of the war.⁵⁵ Unlike other parties, however, the YRP proposed a selective citizenship model for some Syrians in Türkiye as part of a quality-oriented approach.⁵⁶ The proposal for a selective citizenship policy was shared with the public within the framework of the statement in the party programme that “...during this process, the acceptance of these immigrants, who we believe can be useful for our country, to Turkish citizenship, if they so wish, will also be evaluated...”⁵⁷ Fatih Erbakan, the leader of the YRP, stated during the general election process on May 14, 2023 that “*there can be no question of forcibly deporting a small number of integrated people*”. Moreover, Erbakan’s statement that America and Israel have a plan for a terrorist state in northern Syria and that it is important for Syrians in Türkiye to return to their country in order to prevent this plan was an important example of the party’s approach to the issue from an international security perspective.⁵⁸

In its manifesto for the May 14, 2023, general elections, the YRP did not share a detailed policy proposal, but declared that a Ministry of Migration Policies would be established and international migration would be monitored through this ministry.⁵⁹

4.3. The Future Party (GP)

Ahmet Davutoğlu succeeded Ali Babacan as Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2009. Ahmet Davutoğlu’s tenure was marked by Türkiye’s intense interest in the former spheres of influence

⁵⁵ Yeniden Refah Partisi (2023), “2023 Genel Seçimleri Beyannamemiz”, Date of Accession: 12.10.2024 from <https://yenidenrefahpartisi.org.tr/page/2023-genel-secimleri-beyannamemiz/2501>.

⁵⁶ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), “1990 Sonrası Türkiye’ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri”.

⁵⁷ Yeniden Refah Partisi (2018), “Yeniden Refah Partisi Programı”, Date of Accession: 12.10.2024 from <https://yenidenrefahpartisi.org.tr/page/parti-programi/14>.

⁵⁸ Yeniden Refah Partisi (2023), “ABD-İsrail Terör Devleti’ni Engellemek İçin Suriyelilerin Gönderilmesi Şart”, 22.03.2023, Date of Accession: 12.10.2024 from <https://yenidenrefahistanbul.org.tr/mpage/abd-israil-teror-devleti-ni-engellemek-icin-surivelilerin-gonderilmesi-sart-/2260>.

⁵⁹ Yeniden Refah Partisi (2018), “Yeniden Refah Partisi Programı”.

of the Ottoman Empire. This foreign policy breakthrough was publicly referred to as neo-Ottomanism, although Ahmet Davutoğlu considered it a malicious nomenclature.⁶⁰

Ahmet Davutoğlu served as Minister until August 2014, when he became Prime Minister. Ahmet Davutoğlu served as foreign minister during the beginning and development of the Syrian migration movement to Türkiye. During this period, Ahmet Davutoğlu contacted the administration in Damascus on behalf of the government and demanded reforms. When these calls went unanswered, the government developed close ties with the Syrian opposition.⁶¹ The fact that Ahmet Davutoğlu served as Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister during the initial and development of the migration movement sparked a debate on the migration issue in the context of his personality.

The Future Party was founded in December 2019 under the leadership of Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as prime minister in the 62nd, 63rd, and 64th governments of the Republic of Türkiye and is a former leader of the AK Parti. In the party programme of the Future Party, the main proposal for Syrians in Türkiye is to send Syrians under temporary protection, who are described as brothers, back to Syria after peace is established in Syria within the framework of a democratic constitution.⁶²

Similar to the discourses of the ruling party, party officials emphasized that the migration process began within the framework of the “*Ansar Muhajir*” relationship, but that the situation evolved over time. Party officials stated that if the Future Party came to power, border security would be ensured and voluntary returns to safe areas in Syria would be realized.⁶³ On the other hand, the party's promise of repatriation was contingent upon the development of a regime change in Syria and the establishment of a transitional government. Party officials saw the emergence of favorable conditions for the return of Syrians in Türkiye as linked to the formation of a new ruling coalition in Syria.⁶⁴ This is an important example of the fact that the political

⁶⁰ *Hürriyet* (2011), “Neo Osmanlı Yakıştırması Kötü Niyetli”, 29.08.2011, Date of Accession: 24.09.2024 from <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/neo-osmanli-yakistirmasi-kotu-niyetli-18601714>.

⁶¹ Kemal Kirişçi & Sema Karaca (2015), *Hoşgörü ve Çelişkiler: 1989, 1991 ve 2011’de Türkiye’ye Yönelen Kitlemel Mülteci Akınları*, in Murat Erdoğan & Ayhan Kaya (eds.) *Türkiye’nin Göç Tarihi*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, pp. 295-309; Tanıl Bora (2017), *Cereyanlar: Türkiye’de Siyasi İdeolojiler*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, p. 484.

⁶² Gelecek Partisi (2019), “Party Program of Gelecek Partisi”, Date of Accession: 12.10.2024 from https://wp.gelecekpartisi.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Gelecek_Partisi_Program.pdf, p. 129.

⁶³ Gonca Tokyol (2022), “Facing Public Pressure, Turkish Political Parties Outline Their Refugee Policies”, *Turkey Recap*, Date of Accession: 30.01.2025 from <https://www.turkeyrecap.com/p/facing-public-pressure-turkish-political>.

⁶⁴ *Sözcü* (2022), “Davutoğlu’ndan Suriyeli mültecilerle ilgili açıklama”, 19.04.2022, Date of Accession: 23.01.2025 from <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/davutoglundan-suriyeli-multecilerle-igili-aciklama-wp7084942>.

approach of Ahmet Davutoğlu during his term as foreign minister was adopted by the Future Party, and a similar political assessment was maintained.

4.4. Democracy And Progress Party (DEVA)

In 2020, DEVA, which started its activities under the founding chairmanship of Ali Babacan, shared its policies on national issues with the public within the framework of the 14 topics included in the party's program. Migration policy was one of the 14 issues that the party prioritized. In its program, DEVA claimed that the current migration policy of the ruling party was temporary and that a new national migration policy would be prepared under DEVA's rule. It emphasized that the new national migration policy would have two pillars: people-oriented and aligned with national interests.⁶⁵

The party program of DEVA states that DEVA, in cooperation with the international community, will work to facilitate the return of Syrians in Türkiye to their countries of origin, ensuring the safety of their lives and property. On the other hand, although it does not provide a concrete definition, the party program also states that policies will be implemented for the social cohesion processes of the group referred to as “*those who cannot return to their countries*”. Similar to the Good Party and the Future Party, DEVA did not propose a citizenship policy for this group. DEVA's party program states that it will support the activities of universities, research centers and non-governmental organizations and benefit from the recommendations of these institutions. The statement on increasing the effectiveness of local governments in migration policy was a prominent example in this context.⁶⁶

The 12th action plan, announced by the DEVA party in August 2022, focused on the issue of migration and the return program. The party declared that the migration issue would be fully resolved in the first 90 and 360 days after the national elections. The party's action plan emphasized the concept of realistic repatriation, which combines universal human rights with national security. Under this concept, irregular migrants will be sent back, ghettoization will be prevented, and Syrians in Türkiye will be sent back to Syria and other countries after security is ensured. The party also stated that the conditions for exceptional citizenship would be changed and limited.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi (2020), “Party Program of the DEVA”, Date of Accession: 15.11.2024 from <https://cdn.devapartisi.org/14/DEVA-PARTI%CC%87SI%CC%87-PROGRAMI2.pdf>, pp. 108-109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi (2022), “Deva Partisi’nden Sığınmacı ve Düzensiz Göç Sorununa Çözüm: Hukuk Devleti Pusulasından Sapmayacağız”, Date of Accession: 25.01.2025 from <https://devapartisi.org/parti/e-arsiv/deva-partisinden-sginmac-ve-duzensiz-goc-sorununa-cozum-hukuk-devleti-pusulasndan-sasmayacagz>.

4.5. Homeland Party (MP)

In its party program, the Homeland Party defined its political line as a central political movement within the framework of a republican-democratic identity. In the party program of the Homeland Party, which gained an institutional identity on May 17, 2021, under the founding presidency of Muharrem İnce, the issue of migration is addressed under the title of security. The party declared that it would pursue a policy of voluntary repatriation. Regarding voluntary repatriation, the party stated that it would not be satisfied with activities aimed at ensuring internal peace in the country of origin, but would also pursue policies to create a safe zone. Although the party program states that social cohesion policies will be implemented for those who cannot return, there is no explicit proposal for citizenship. Drawing attention to the economic dimension of the issue, the party declared that the resources allocated to migrants would be used effectively and efficiently by establishing a program for a migrant registration system.⁶⁸ Muharrem İnce, the leader of the Homeland Party, publicly stated that he would send Syrians back to Türkiye during the 2023 parliamentary elections.⁶⁹

4.6. Victory Party (ZP)

The Victory Party was founded as a political party with a nationalist ideology under the leadership of Ümit Özdağ on August 26, 2021, a date that holds a special significance in Türkiye's historical memory. In his past political experience, Ümit Özdağ has served as deputy chairman of the MHP, which claims to represent the nationalist wing of Turkish politics, and the Good Party. Özdağ has come to the fore with his harsh and critical views on migration.⁷⁰

The Victory Party, founded under the leadership of Ümit Özdağ, has identified irregular migration and the issue of Syrians in Türkiye as its main policy area. The party is the pioneer of anti-immigration policies in Turkish politics.⁷¹ In fact, in its party program, in addition to the titles of “*state crisis*”, “*crisis of national unity*”, and “*economic crisis*”, the Victory Party identified the issue of migration as Türkiye's most important problem area under the title of

⁶⁸ Memleket Partisi (2021), “Parti Programı”, Date of Accession: 10.12.2024 from <https://www.memleketpartisi.org.tr/parti/parti-programi>.

⁶⁹ Demirören Haber Ajansı (2023), “Muharrem İnce: Memleket Partisi Olarak Huzur Vadediyoruz”, Date of Accession: 24.01.2025 from <https://www.dha.com.tr/politika/muharrem-ince-memleket-partisi-olarak-huzur-vadediyoruz-2240645>.

⁷⁰ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/a), “1990 Sonrası Türkiye’ye Yönelik Göçlerin Değişen Yapısının Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikalarına Etkileri”; Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye’de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

⁷¹ Melek Aylin Özoflu & Merve Hazer Yiğit Uyar & Apak Kerem Altıntop & Can Uyar (2025), “Populist Securitization of Migration: The Anti-Immigrant Zafer Party Example in Türkiye”, *Mediterranean Politics*, January, pp. 1-28.

“*crisis of those under temporary protection*”. The party’s manifesto, written by Ümit Özdağ, claimed that Syria had been deliberately made unstable by foreign powers in order to encourage Syrians to migrate to Türkiye, and that the ultimate goal was to start a civil war on Turkish soil.⁷² In the founding manifesto of the Victory Party, “...*Today, 100 years after our war of independence, imperialism is attacking our country again. 100 years ago, imperialism used the hired Greek army to put an end to the law of the Turkish nation in Anatolia, and this time it is attacking Türkiye with millions of asylum seekers and refugees that it has driven into Türkiye with a strategic migration engineering similar to the migration of tribes.*” This statement was an important example of the Victory Party’s assessment of the migration issue as a survival problem.⁷³

The space and importance that Victory Party gives to anti-immigration in its party program, policies, discourse and promises strengthens the possibility that the party can be considered as a niche/boutique party model focused on migration. Similar to European countries, the example of Victory Party is an important development that suggests that party models that focus on migration in Turkish politics, similar to European countries, may generate more debate in the future.⁷⁴

The first general elections in which the Victory Party, which stands out for its nationalist identity and anti-immigration policies, participated were the presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14, 2023. While the party participated in the elections with the ATA alliance, its main arguments focused on the repatriation of Syrians and irregular migrants in Türkiye and border security. Sinan Oğan, the Alliance’s presidential candidate in the first round, promised that these groups would be repatriated within a year. Sinan Oğan stated that the first decree he would sign if elected president would be on this issue. The Victory Party influenced the course of the election process with its anti-immigration policies. The party included the issue of repatriation in the seven-point protocol of the alliance it developed with the CHP before the second round of the elections. In this context, the protocol included the statement “*All asylum seekers and refugees, especially Syrians, will be sent back to their countries within one year at the latest*”.⁷⁵ This situation can be discussed in the context of the similarity of the anti-

⁷² Zafer Partisi (2021/a), “Zafer Partisi Parti Programı”, Date of Accession: 11.12.2024 from <https://zaferpartisi.org.tr/parti-programi/>.

⁷³ Zafer Partisi (2021/b), “Kuruluş Manifestosu”, Date of Accession: 11.12.2024 from <https://www.zaferpartisi.org.tr/kurulus-manifestosu/>.

⁷⁴ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye’de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

⁷⁵ Ahmet Ceylan & İsa Uslu & Leman İncedere (2025), “Immigration Debates in Recent Turkish Politics and the Victory Party as an Example of an Anti-Immigrant Niche Party”.

immigration party models in Europe with the examples of the influence of central political movements on migration policies.⁷⁶

Conclusion

This study argues that the politicization of migration in Türkiye has entered a new phase. Particularly after 2017, newly established political parties have addressed migration as a distinct public policy domain, alongside traditional areas such as education, defense, and the economy, by developing policy proposals on this issue and shaping their institutional identities in line with these proposals. This development demonstrates that migration in Türkiye is no longer merely a humanitarian or administrative concern, but has become one of the core elements shaping political identities and party strategies. Two main dynamics underlie this development. The first is the increasing public and political debate surrounding migration movements that Türkiye has faced in recent years, which show tendencies toward permanence. The second dynamic is the changes in Türkiye's political system. The transition to a presidential system, the lowering of the electoral threshold, and the institutionalization of alliance politics have enabled new political parties with relatively low vote shares to gain visibility within the system and influence policy fields. The case of the Victory Party is particularly noteworthy as it illustrates the emergence of a niche party model focused exclusively on anti-migration rhetoric, which has been able to impact both public discourse and the narratives of mainstream parties.

The migration policies of the parties examined in this study differ along three principal axes. The first is the perception of security. The Good Party, Victory Party and YRP perceive migration movements as part of an externally driven strategy targeting Türkiye's demographic structure. According to these parties, migration from Syria is not only a humanitarian crisis but also a structural problem threatening Türkiye's border security, internal peace, and national unity. The Homeland Party similarly approaches migration from a security perspective. Such discourses indicate that these parties, especially the Victory Party, frame migration as an existential threat in mobilizing their electorate, centering anti-immigrant rhetoric within their political communication.

The second central axis is the approaches of the political parties examined toward citizenship policies. The majority of the analyzed parties explicitly oppose granting citizenship to Syrians or advocate for stringent limitations on the process. However, the YRP distinguishes itself by

⁷⁶ Ahmet Ceylan (2022/b), *İdeoloji, Tarihsel Bellek ve Travma Ekseninde Türkiye'de Siyasal Partilerin Göç Politikaları*.

proposing a “*selective citizenship*” model, which is structured not on ethnic or religious bases but on criteria of benefit and merit. This approach bears resemblance to the citizenship policy proposed by the ruling party after 2016, although its systematic framework has not yet been clearly articulated. On the other hand, the DEVA and Homeland Party emphasize the concept of “*integration*” rather than citizenship, proposing social integration policies targeted at a limited group of migrants defined as those “*who cannot return*”. While these policies do not include explicit citizenship promises, they may open the door to citizenship opportunities for individuals meeting certain long-term conditions.

The third central axis is the approaches of the political parties examined toward the return of migrants. Most parties address return policies within the framework of foreign policy, advocating for the establishment of direct diplomatic relations with Syria, the creation of safe zones, and the facilitation of voluntary returns through international cooperation. In this regard, the policies of the Good Party, Victory Party, DEVA, YRP, and Homeland Party show relative similarity. Some of these parties (particularly the Good Party, the Victory Party and the Homeland Party) propose more radical measures by supporting the use of military/interventionist methods to enforce safe zone strategies, thereby framing the issue not only as a domestic policy problem but also as an international security matter. These policies have the potential to influence mainstream parties as well. Indeed, the alliance protocol formed between the Victory Party and CHP during the 2023 elections exemplifies this influence. The Future Party, meanwhile, occupies a unique position, arguing that mass returns cannot be realized as long as the current political regime in Syria remains in power, and that safe, dignified, and voluntary returns would only be possible through regime change and a democratic transition process. However, following recent regime changes in Syria, it remains unclear how this development will affect the Future Party’s migration policy moving forward. This uncertainty is significant not only for the Future Party but also for other political parties, and it indicates that the issue of migration is likely to become one of the main items on the political agenda in the upcoming election processes.

As a result, the politicization of migration in Türkiye is progressively deepening. One of the clearest indicators of this new phase of politicization is the establishment of the Good Party, which was founded in 2017 with a political agenda shaped significantly around migration policies. In this regard, 2017 can be considered a critical turning point in the increasing centrality of migration within Turkish politics. The emergence of subsequent political parties further reinforces the continuity of this trend. Migration policies have become a determining

factor in the construction of party identities, voter mobilization, and the formation of political alliances. In addition, the changing electoral system in Türkiye constitutes one of the key structural drivers of this transformation. In this context, it is important not to overlook the risk that opposition parties, even while claiming to be committed to human rights and democratic values, may also shift toward more security-oriented and exclusionary rhetoric under the new political dynamics shaped by migration. This politicization process also enables political parties to reproduce migration debates through existing axes of polarization. Therefore, future research focusing on how long-standing political cleavages in Türkiye are being reconfigured through migration-related discourse will contribute significantly to understanding the deeper dynamics of migration's politicization.

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