ARTICLE

Electoral pressure, reputational risks, and coalition politics: how established parties respond to the rise of anti-immigrant parties

Ezgi Elçi (iD), Deniz Şenol Sert (iD) and Evren Balta (iD)

Department of International Relations, Özyeğin University, İstanbul, Turkey
Corresponding author: Ezgi Elçi; Email: ezgi.elci@ozyegin.edu.tr

Abstract

The rise of anti-immigrant parties has reshaped global politics, forcing mainstream parties to recalibrate their strategies. This study examines how Turkish political parties responded to the emergence of the Victory Party (Zafer Partisi) in 2021, which placed immigration at the center of political debate. Drawing on 1,089 parliamentary group speeches (2011–2023) and elite interviews with key party figures, we identified three key factors shaping party responses: voter overlap with radical-right parties; reputational risks associated with shifting policy positions; and access to political power. Our findings revealed five strategies: issue avoidance; amplification; cooptation; repositioning; and reinforcement. Unlike conventional models that emphasize voter competition, we highlight the role of political power in shaping party strategies, particularly in competitive authoritarian settings. This study advances the understanding of how mainstream parties navigate niche party pressures, offering a broader perspective beyond Eurocentric and electoralist frameworks.

Keywords: anti-immigrant parties; established party responses; party policy shifts; refugee crisis impact; holistic grading

Introduction

The year 2024 has witnessed unsettling changes in party competition, especially in the European Parliament elections. As anti-immigrant parties achieved significant victories, the number of these parties also increased, encompassing a broad range of radical-right ideologies (Hernández-Morales and Cokelaere 2024). Many anti-immigrant parties gained traction after the 2008 financial crash and the 2015 refugee crisis, which followed the influx of migrants from conflict-ridden countries (Mudde 2021). Even Spain and Portugal, once seen as exceptions, now face rising anti-immigrant sentiment (Heyne and Manucci 2021). Furthermore, despite electoral systems that may deter the emergence of new contenders, anti-immigrant movements have succeeded by capturing influential positions, as exemplified by

developments in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). For instance, Donald Trump's (re)election as US president, with his explicit promise to curtail illegal immigration, raised questions about the future of tolerance in the US (Swan and Ward 2024). Similarly, following a referendum marked by anti-immigrant campaign themes, the UK's decision to exit the European Union (EU) in 2016 sparked significant academic discourse on these developments (Baldini et al. 2022).

Turkey's party responses to migration present a puzzling case in today's anti-immigrant climate. Since 2011, Turkey has welcomed a large influx of refugees fleeing Syria's civil war, who now make up approximately 4 percent of the country's population.[1] Official statistics show that, as of April 2025, Turkey hosts 2.8 million Syrians under a temporary protection regime, positioning it as one of the world's leading refugee-hosting nations. A common explanation for Turkey's delayed politicization of immigration centers on the framing strategy of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; AKP). The ruling AKP has mitigated potential backlash against Syrian refugees by promoting a discourse of co-religiosity (Çarkoğlu and Elçi 2021). The government specifically framed the arrival of refugees within the religious brotherhood, invoking religious sentiments by drawing parallels with the Prophet Mohammed's migration to Medina, thereby preventing widespread hostility towards Syrian refugees (Elçi 2022; Fisunoğlu and Sert 2019). Pro-government media portrayed migration as manageable, not a crisis, portraying Syrian refugees as temporary "guests" (Sert and Danış 2021).

More recently, however, most political parties in Turkey adopted a more anti-immigrant stance, driven by worsening economic conditions, the increased visibility of refugees, and the government's accommodating refugee policies, which sparked a rise in voter discontent (İnanç 2023). Thus, political parties have responded to these systemic and structural changes through strategic action, with inter-party competition playing a decisive role in shaping their approaches.

We argue that the establishment of the anti-immigrant Victory Party (Zafer Partisi; ZP) in August 2021 was also a factor that fundamentally reshaped the political landscape and intensified the debate on migration. By exclusively focusing on immigration, the ZP emerged as Turkey's counterpart to Europe's radical-right anti-immigrant parties, turning negative sentiments about immigration into a prominent political issue and bringing them under the public spotlight. Mainstream Turkish parties could no longer sideline the growing salience of immigration. Consequently, all Turkish political parties have included proposals related to immigration in their manifestos and adjusted their political rhetoric (Aydemir 2023; Secen et al. 2024).

This article centers on the period of refugee flows from Syria to examine how the emergence of the ZP has influenced the immigration positions of Turkey's established political parties by highlighting three key factors: the voter overlaps between established parties and radical-right parties (RRPs); the reputational risks associated with policy shifts; and coalitional politics. This framework offers a more nuanced explanation of party behavior than existing models, emphasizing that reputational concerns – especially in religious and culturally sensitive contexts – can outweigh

---

[1] We have tried to limit the term "refugee" to describe Syrians living in Turkey. However, while addressing the literature, we also frequently use the terms "refugee," "migrant," and "immigrant" interchangeably. For a discussion about these terms, see Carling (2023).

immediate electoral considerations. Shaped by voter overlap with RRPs and the reputational risks involved in policy shifts, we identify five key strategies that mainstream parties employ in response: issue avoidance; cooptation; confrontation; amplification; and repositioning. Our framework, thus, provides a comprehensive understanding of how established parties navigate niche party pressure competition and reshape political discourse in response to emerging challengers like the ZP.

We employed a mixed-methods approach to test our arguments. Our quantitative data come from parliamentary group speeches delivered by the leaders of five relevant parties from left and right in the Turkish parliament, which gained more than twenty seats between 2011 and 2023: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (AKP); Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (Republican People's Party [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi; CHP]); Devlet Bahçeli (Nationalist Action Party [Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi; MHP]); Meral Akşener (Good Party [İyi Parti; İYİP]); and leaders of the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi; HDP) – Sebahat Tuncel, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Gültan Kışanak, Figen Yüksekdağ, Selahattin Demirtaş, Serpil Kemalbay, Pervin Buldan, Sezai Temelli, Mithat Sancar, and several other important figures during the arrest of Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ.[2] We employ a holistic grading approach by considering the anti- and pro-immigrant weight of rhetoric when analyzing speeches. To enrich our data and strengthen our causal claims, we conducted semi-structured elite interviews with high-ranking officials of the same parties. Additionally, we analyzed party documents, including texts, policy programs, and other official materials, to gain deeper insight into each party's formal positions and internal dynamics regarding immigration. We also shared and discussed our findings with party representatives in workshops, providing context and further validating our analysis.

The following section discusses the theoretical framework underlying our study. Next, we examine political party competition and anti-immigration dynamics in Turkey. We then outline our data collection methods and analytical approach before presenting the results. Finally, we conclude with a summary of the key findings and their broader implications.

Theoretical background

Anti-immigration is a defining characteristic of RRPs (Rooduijn 2018; Santana et al. 2020). Their stance is often summarized as a demand for stricter immigration controls and reducing the number of immigrants entering the country (Guia 2016; Van Spanje 2011). This anti-immigrant stance is a manifestation of their nativist ideology, which is the most prominent feature of RRPs, alongside populism and authoritarianism (Mudde 2007). Rooted in nativism, RRPs portray immigrants as threats to societal cohesion and liberal values, while casting them as economically burdensome and aligned with out-of-touch elites (Mudde 2012, 2022; Pappas 2016). Rhetoric varies with perceived cultural distance of immigrants, with softer rhetoric or issue shifts when immigrants are seen as culturally similar (Brumat and Geddes 2023; Moise et al. 2024; Poushter et al. 2022).

---

[2] The HDP is one of the successor parties of the Kurdish political movement. Although the HDP is still active, the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi; DEM Parti) undertook the HDP's role.

In the European context, Muslim migration has intensified the focus on nativism and perceptions of cultural incompatibility. This shift has fueled the rise of anti-immigrant parties and leaders, prompting heated debates about their political impact, particularly on the strategies of mainstream and established parties (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020). Research on how these established parties respond to the emergence of anti-immigrant rivals has yielded mixed results. Scholars debate whether these parties contagiously influence mainstream rivals (Mudde 2004; Rooduijn et al. 2014). Dahlström and Sundell (2012) show that established parties can reduce support for anti-immigrant parties by adopting stricter immigration policies (impeding hypothesis), but they can also inadvertently increase support by legitimizing these parties' arguments (facilitating hypothesis).

This influence of RRPs on political discourse is particularly evident in the way that immigration has become a decisive factor in voter behavior. Abou-Chadi et al. (2022) show that immigration has increasingly surpassed socio-economic indicators as a predictor of party preference, especially between center-right parties and RRPs. In several European countries, including Italy, Austria, and Sweden, rising public concern about immigration has driven mainstream parties and RRPs to adopt increasingly anti-immigrant stances, transforming immigration politics and mainstreaming radical-right agendas (Demker and Odmalm 2022; Dennison and Geddes 2022; Hadj Abdou and Ruedin 2022).

As discussed earlier, there is no single common response to the rise of anti-immigrant parties; instead, responses vary depending on the context, country, and party family. Center-right parties often adopt nuanced approaches to immigration, balancing economic interests with cultural concerns and national security. Moving towards a more restrictive and assimilationist position, center-right parties may risk losing more economically and culturally liberal voters (Bale et al. 2022). Migration politicization challenges social democrats, caught between progressive ideals and working-class concerns, as seen in the Danish case where tougher immigration policies alienated liberal voters (Arnesen et al. 2023; Rathgeb and Wolkenstein 2022). Political parties, thus, adopt various approaches, ranging from directly confronting radical-right narratives to strategically co-opting anti-immigrant policies to appeal to broader voter bases.

Meguid's (2005, 2023) Position, Saliency, and Ownership Theory (PSOT) outlines how mainstream parties respond to niche rivals, which also applies to anti-immigrant parties. These strategies shape how mainstream parties address the issues introduced by niche challengers. "Position" refers to whether a mainstream party aligns with, opposes, or ignores the niche party's stance on a given issue. By adopting or rejecting the niche party's position, mainstream parties can influence public perception of the issue. "Saliency" involves how much attention mainstream parties give to the issue. They can either increase the issue's prominence, drawing more voter attention to it, or reduce its importance in political debate, attempting to undermine the niche party's agenda. Lastly, "ownership" is the strategy whereby mainstream parties attempt to claim an issue as their own, positioning themselves as the most credible or authoritative voice on the matter. When a mainstream party successfully owns an issue, it diminishes the niche party's relevance. The PSOT posits that the fate of niche parties is largely determined by the strategic responses of mainstream parties to these components, particularly how they accommodate or challenge the niche parties

based on their positioning and the salience of issues (Hutter and Kriesi 2022; Krause et al. 2023). If mainstream parties downplay or co-opt an issue effectively, they can reduce the niche party's influence. However, failure to respond strategically can lead to the niche party's growth.

The PSOT offers electoral insights but overlooks discourse normalization (Brown et al. 2023). A narrow focus on electoral outcomes can obscure the broader impact of mainstream party strategies on public discourse and the normalization of niche party ideas. Building upon the PSOT, our analysis shows that when niche parties claim ownership of an issue, it not only increases the saliency of that issue but also increases the tone in the public debate.

We also extend the PSOT by highlighting the importance of voter overlap and reputational risks as key factors shaping party strategies. The reputational costs are especially relevant where concerns about cultural compatibility with immigrants are little pronounced and the political climate is highly polarized. Reputational risk refers to the potential damage to a party's **credibility, ideological coherence, and long-term voter trust** when shifting its stance on contentious issues like immigration, which is crucial for **established, ideologically driven, and coalition-dependent parties**, as drastic shifts can alienate core supporters and undermine their historical positioning. Parties with **strong ideological commitments** (e.g. nationalist or center-left parties) must carefully balance electoral strategy with maintaining consistency. In polarized political environments, reputational costs often outweigh short-term electoral gains, making strategic positioning a crucial factor in party decision-making.

As Downs (1957) argues, political parties adapt their offerings to match the demands and preferences of the electorate when they are threatened by the entrance of newcomers into the electoral marketplace. RRPs tend to exert a greater influence on those political parties that seek the votes of a similar constituency. However, RRPs may also have less influence over other parties when reputational costs are at play. These costs often stem from concerns about losing credibility with voters if they alter their positions (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017). Similarly, according to Harmel and Svåsand (1997), an established party only changes its ideological position in response to a successful newcomer if the latter takes votes from the former and when the reputational costs are low. This strategy suggests that the impact of anti-immigrant parties is more pronounced on political parties vying for the same constituency, while its effect is reduced if ideologically oriented parties appeal to constituencies different from those of the anti-immigration parties.

Our analysis highlights that complex, context-dependent factors shape the responses of established parties to the rise of anti-immigrant parties. This variability stems from the interplay between two primary dynamics: the radical right's ability to appeal to overlapping voter bases; and the reputational or political risks that established parties incur when altering their policy stances. We show that the strategic choices of mainstream parties are not uniform but depend significantly on how much an RRP, like the ZP in Turkey, threatens their electoral base. Some parties may adopt more anti-immigrant rhetoric to compete for similar voters, while others may hesitate due to the potential reputational or political damage that policy shifts could cause among their traditional supporters. By incorporating this dual focus on voter appeal and reputation management, our study broadens the theoretical understanding of party competition in competitive authoritarian contexts like

Turkey, where the cultural compatibility of immigrants is less of an issue. This setting contrasts significantly with the Western European focus of most previous research, providing new insights into party strategies in non-Western environments, going beyond Eurocentrism, electoralism, and externalism (Castelli Gattinara 2020).

Finally, we propose extending the analysis of mainstream party strategies beyond voter overlap and reputational risks to include a third mechanism: access to political power. While voter overlap explains how parties adjust their stance based on electoral competition, and reputational risks account for long-term credibility concerns, the pursuit of political influence within ruling coalitions can also shape a party's strategic positioning. Smaller parties, particularly those that lack the electoral strength to govern independently, often prioritize coalition stability and policy-making influence over ideological consistency. In such cases, these parties may moderate their rhetoric, de-emphasize contentious issues, or strategically align with dominant partners to secure a role in governance.

This dynamic is particularly pronounced in authoritarian-leaning systems, where access to power is not solely determined by electoral success but also by political maneuvering within restrictive institutional settings. In these contexts, opposition parties may face constraints on their ability to directly challenge the ruling bloc, leading them to adopt calculated rhetorical shifts that maximize their political relevance while avoiding direct confrontation with incumbents. Similarly, coalition partners of the ruling party may downplay divisive issues to maintain influence over state resources, policymaking, and institutional appointments. Thus, we refine our framework by recognizing that mainstream party responses to niche challengers are shaped not only by electoral incentives and reputational concerns but also by coalition dynamics and power structures.

Political party landscape and anti-immigrant discourse in Turkey

Turkey's competitive authoritarianism favors the ruling AKP–MHP alliance despite intense electoral competition (Balta and Demiralp 2024; Esen and Gumuscu 2016). In 2023, the ZP became a kingmaker by brokering a run-off deal with the opposition. However, after almost two years of elections, the ZP's leader Özdağ was arrested on charges of publicly inciting the public to hatred and hostility or insulting.

As the study tracks how a niche party reshaped mainstream responses, we focus specifically on the responses of political parties that hold parliamentary group status, as these parties play a central role in shaping political discourse and policy decisions. The AKP, in power since 2002, blends conservatism with populism (Balta 2023). Rooting in its Islamist conservatism, the AKP implemented an open-door policy for refugees, particularly those fleeing the Syrian conflict. Although its manifestos endorse eventual refugee repatriation once Syria stabilizes, President Erdoğan has consistently framed their continued presence in Turkey as an Islamic duty to help those in need (Balta et al. 2023). In Turkey's competitive authoritarian regime, where political survival depends on careful navigation of both electoral competition and authoritarian control, reputational risks are especially acute for the AKP. Given the party's reliance on religious and cultural narratives, Erdoğan's stance on Syrian refugees taps deeply into Islamic principles of charity and protection. Religious framing limits the AKP's flexibility without alienating its conservative base.

Consequently, while public sentiment around refugees may evolve or intensify, especially as economic pressures rise, the AKP's commitment to a religiously framed refugee policy remains a key aspect of its identity. In this context, the AKP's refugee policy is not just about humanitarian obligations but is also deeply tied to its broader political strategy and the need to maintain ideological coherence within its voter base.

In contrast, the MHP promotes a right-wing platform grounded in Turkish nationalism, drawing on historical ethno-nationalist narratives and aligning with the broader family of nationalist parties globally (Aytürk and Esen 2021). Historically, the MHP and Bahçeli opposed immigration and favored strict controls. However, after forming the People's Alliance with the AKP in 2018, the MHP significantly softened its anti-immigrant rhetoric. The shift prioritized policymaking influence via the AKP alliance over short-term vote-seeking through populist anti-immigrant appeals (Kurtoglu Eskisar and Durmuslar 2023; Yanaşmayan et al. 2019). By downplaying its earlier hardline stance on immigration, the MHP has focused on embedding its nationalist ideology more deeply into the broader governance framework, ensuring its ethno-nationalist principles are reflected in policy decisions without alienating the AKP's conservative voter base.

The CHP, Turkey's secular center-left party, aligns with the global family of social democratic parties (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2021). However, despite its left-leaning orientation, the CHP promotes a form of secular nativism, where cultural compatibility plays a key role. More specifically, Muslim immigrants, particularly Syrians, are often perceived as incompatible with Turkey's secular identity (Çarkoğlu and Elçi 2021). As a result, the CHP supports the repatriation of Syrian refugees, stringent measures to prevent the employment of illegal immigrants, strict border controls, and negotiations with international partners to share the burden of migration. It balances progressive values with voter nativism, particularly regarding the perceived cultural and socio-economic impact of immigration.

The foundation of the İYİP in 2017, following a split within the MHP, represents a quest for a more moderate nationalist alternative within the Turkish political spectrum (Gerim 2023). According to its official party documents, the İYİP has emerged as one of the most staunchly anti-immigrant parties despite its centrist positioning. The party advocates for the repatriation of Syrian refugees and supports strict pushback policies at the borders. Like the CHP, the İYİP endorses stringent measures to enhance border security and prevent mass migration to Turkey. However, the İYİP's nationalism is more explicitly ethnic compared to the CHP's secular nativism, framing immigration as a threat to the ethnic cohesion of the Turkish nation. The party also supports policies such as refusing citizenship to refugees, canceling refugee privileges, and promoting the gradual return or deportation of illegal immigrants through repatriation centers (Balta et al. 2023).

The HDP, rooted in Kurdish leftist politics, emphasizes human rights in migration (Ayan Musil 2022). The HDP takes a human rights-centered approach to migration, emphasizing the protection and dignity of asylum seekers and refugees. According to the party's official documents, it calls for ensuring equal and free lives for refugees and asylum seekers, defending the human rights of all individuals residing in Turkey, and fostering a society where coexistence is built on combating racism against refugees and immigrants (Balta et al. 2023). The party's emphasis on human rights,

social justice, and anti-racism not only reflects its leftist ideology but also aligns with its broader advocacy for marginalized groups, including the Kurdish minority.

Amidst established parties' varying responses and strategies regarding immigration, the ZP emerged in August 2021 as an openly anti-immigrant political entity. The ZP was formed as a splinter party from the İYİP, a product of an internal division within the MHP. The ZP has become a momentum-gaining player in Turkish politics, exerting considerable influence on the positions and strategies of these established parties, challenging their stances, and reshaping the broader political discourse on immigration. Like its European counterparts, the ZP portrays other political parties as beholden to special interests, identifying three distinct groups within Turkey's political landscape based on their stance toward immigration. First, the ruling AKP–MHP coalition is criticized for allowing an influx of illegal migrants and refugees into Turkey. Second, the opposition bloc is characterized as the "yellow opposition," accused of merely pretending to challenge the incumbents on immigration issues. Lastly, the ZP accuses the pro-minority HDP and minor socialist parties of betraying the country and the principles of the Turkish Republic. The ZP claims that it presents the only viable moral alternative through its resolute commitment to repatriating all migrants, as encapsulated in its prominent slogan: "Victory Party will come; the refugees will go!" Thus, the ZP has positioned itself as an alternative to a system it claims failed to address the immigration issue while presenting itself as the antidote to what it perceives as a complacent approach by Turkey's political establishment (Balta et al. 2023).

Drawing on and extending the PSOT, our analysis shows that when niche parties claim issue ownership, such as on migration, they increase issue saliency and polarize public debate, while mainstream party responses are shaped not only by voter overlap but also by reputational risks, which may outweigh short-term electoral gains in polarized contexts. Consequently, we propose the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Since the rise of the ZP, parties such as the CHP, MHP, and İYİP – or other parties occupying a similar policy space – have increasingly adopted more explicitly anti-immigrant positions, as they view the ZP as a threat to their electoral base.

Hypothesis 2. Since the emergence of the ZP, parties like the AKP and HDP – or those in policy spaces distinct from the ZP – have kept their pro-immigrant stances, as they are concerned about the reputational costs of shifting their positions.

Data collection and methodology

To assess the positions of other political parties both before and after the ZP's founding, we conducted a content analysis, employing a comprehensive holistic grading approach on 1,089 parliamentary group speeches delivered by five political parties from June 2011 to April 2023.[3] The selected parties were the AKP, CHP, HDP,

---

[3] Erdoğan's speeches also include those delivered during meetings with *muhtars* (local headmen) between August 2014 and April 2017, which covers his election as president until the transition from the

İYİP, and MHP, who have the right to hold such meetings because they have more than twenty parliamentary deputies. All the speeches can be accessed via the parties' official websites and YouTube channels.

Although this form of political communication is unique to Turkey, there are several advantages to using such speeches. First, during a parliamentary season, each party conducts a weekly meeting broadcast live on television in which the party leaders address their fellow deputies, party members, guests, and even ordinary people (by appointment). The participants sometimes even chant and display banners. In addition to discussing current issues, party leaders use this platform to comment on each other's policies and actions, particularly by responding promptly to their remarks. Second, because of their frequency, the meetings allow us to capture subtle changes over time. Third, given that Turkey's political system is highly leader-dominant, party chairpersons wield significant authority in shaping major political decisions (Elçi 2019). This authority was strengthened further after transitioning from the parliamentary to the presidential system in 2018. Therefore, parliamentary group speeches are widely used in academic research on Turkish politics (e.g. Apaydın and Müftüler-Baç 2022; Aydemir 2023; Bulut and Hacıoğlu 2021; Öney 2018; Öney and Selck 2017).

Holistic grading assesses texts based on overall tone and salience, not word frequency (Jönsson et al. 2021; Newcomb 1977). As a content analysis tool, holistic grading requires the interpretation of whole texts instead of using parts of them. The coder evaluates the overall qualities of the texts and assigns a single grade without any intermediate calculations. Holistic grading also differs from quantitative or computerized techniques that use words as the unit of analysis since the former allows researchers to understand the underlying meanings in a text, which is challenging in the latter. Instead of detecting and counting specific words, holistic grading enables coders to assess the tone and style. Like populism and nationalism, it is difficult to capture anti-immigration with specific words. For instance, counting the word "refugees" may yield puzzling results since it may continue with "must go" or "can stay." Moreover, texts may contain different positions, and a negative tone can be balanced by a positive assessment or vice versa. Therefore, human coders have the advantage of interpreting complex phrases better than computerized tools to capture anti- or pro-immigration themes (Hawkins 2009).

The holistic grading followed five main steps. First, we established a holistic grading rubric similar to previous studies to measure populism (Hawkins 2009) and nationalism (Hawkins et al. 2021). We generated our coding rubric based on the literature in the following way. Given that every country has both pro- and anti-immigrant parties, we provided guidelines to our coders regarding both poles to check three issues: whether the speech supports restricting immigration; whether the speech uses anti-immigrant frames (cultural, security, economic, and political) (Mudde 2012); and whether the speech applies us-versus-them rhetoric. The coders then evaluated the speeches using both categorical and continuous scales. The latter originally ranged from 0 (pro-immigrant) to 2 (anti-immigrant). However, we

---

parliamentary to the presidential system. Previously, Erdoğan could not hold parliamentary group meetings because the president had to be impartial in Turkey (Elçi 2019).

rescaled it ranging from 0 to 1 to enable better comparison with salience. Higher scores indicate high immigration saliency and an anti-immigration tone.

In brief, the saliency of the migration issue is assessed by calculating the ratio of texts containing immigration-related content to the total number of texts, providing a consistent measure of how prominently the issue is featured in party leaders' public discourse. The tone is evaluated for texts mentioning immigration, ranging from pro-immigrant to anti-immigrant. We present the holistic grading rubric and the distribution of speeches by year and party in the online Appendix (Supplementary Material).

In the second step, five trained coders conducted a pilot-tested evaluation. Third, we conducted a reliability test using ten randomly selected speeches.[4] Krippendorff's alpha values indicated that our reliability scores were above the acceptable levels of 0.712 for interval values (Krippendorff 2004).[5] Fourth, after generating a Qualtrics page for coding to minimize potential errors, we distributed the speeches to the five coders, who entered their evaluations into the links based on the rubric. Finally, we merged and cleaned the data before the analysis.

In addition, we interviewed eleven key political elites involved in shaping immigration policies between September 2022 and March 2023. These interviews sought to provide deeper insights into the strategies and decision-making processes of the political parties in response to the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and the emergence of the ZP. Our interviewees were recruited through party centers and included individuals officially or unofficially responsible for migration policy, including those who draft reports and shape party discourse. The interviews covered senior figures from the AKP, CHP, MHP, HDP, and İYİP to ensure a comprehensive understanding of immigration policy debates across the political spectrum.

These semi-structured interviews allowed in-depth discussions of personal perspectives and broader party strategies. We explored how political elites framed immigration issues, how they responded to shifts in public sentiment, and the role of inter-party competition in shaping their rhetoric. All interviews were transcribed and hand-coded to systematically identify recurring themes and key patterns. Notably, our findings highlight the ongoing tension between reputational concerns and electoral strategies, shedding light on how parties navigate the trade-offs between ideological consistency, voter appeal, and coalition politics.

---

[4] Our analysis was conducted in two main stages due to funding reasons. We first analyzed the period between 2011 and 2021 using 900 speeches, of which 219 mentioned the Syrian refugee issue. We selected ten speeches out of 219 for reliability tests in the first round of analysis, which corresponds to 5 percent of speeches mentioning the Syrian refugee issue. We did not take speeches that did not mention Syrian refugees into account during the reliability tests because they did not include any information about them. We continued the second round of analysis with the same coders and rubric. Hence, we did not conduct a reliability test in the second round.

[5] Krippendorff's alpha corresponds to "the extent to which the proportion of the differences that are in error deviates from perfect agreement," where $\alpha = 1$ is the highest value (Krippendorff 2004, 223). According to Krippendorff (2004), the lowest acceptable reliability score is 0.667. We used the "icr" package in Rstudio to calculate reliability (Staudt and L'Ecuyer 2020).

Analysis and results

In our analysis of each speech, we assessed two key aspects: the salience of the immigration issue, whether it referenced Syrian refugees or immigration; and the tone, specifically gauging its anti-immigrant stance. Of the 1,089 speeches analyzed, 287 (26 percent) addressed the topic of immigration from Syria, which underscores the significant presence of the issue within Turkey's political discourse and political agenda.

Between 2011 and 2021, the tone of these speeches did not pass the midpoint (0.5), which means that political discussion of the refugee issue was not explicitly anti-immigrant (see Figure 1). Saliency varied more than tone, peaking twice in 2015 and 2018 before decreasing, particularly after 2019, to a level similar to that in 2011. The peak in 2015 can be explained by the rising number of Syrians crossing from Turkey to Europe after the conflict in Syria intensified during the EU's refugee crisis. The peak in 2018 can be explained by the MHP's decision to join the People's Alliance with the AKP for the 2019 election campaign, along with Turkey's cross-border military operations in Northern Syria. Figure 1 also indicates that the ZP's founding changed the overall tone of speeches about the Syrian refugee issue to become anti-immigration. That is, after passing the scale midpoint in 2022, the tone became slightly more anti-immigration in 2023. Saliency also briefly increased in 2022, although it decreased in 2023. Overall, speeches became more anti-immigrant after the ZP's rise (difference $= 0.08$, $p = 0.08$), whereas saliency decreased (difference $= -0.06$, $p = 0.08$).

We also analyzed party positions before and after the ZP's establishment. To this end, we divided the period between 2011 and 2023 into three: 2011–2017; 2018–before the ZP's establishment; and after the ZP's establishment–2023. Given that Turkey's worsening economic conditions and backlash against refugees heightened particularly after 2018, we decided to apply a triple periodization to consider alternative explanations. Therefore, our baseline period covers 2018 and 26 August 2021, the day of the ZP's establishment.[6]

As Figure 2 shows, the emergence of this new contender in the political arena notably impacted the İYİP and CHP, which occupied a similar policy space to the ZP on the issue of refugees and migration and appealed to a similar voter base. In particular, the İYİP's leader, Meral Akşener, shifted towards a more anti-immigrant stance, placing greater emphasis on the refugee issue, such that her party became the most anti-immigrant of the five parties. Akşener's tone was scored at almost 0.75, with 1 representing a completely anti-immigration position. Immigration was also particularly salient, being included in almost 30 percent of her speeches. The case of the İYİP and its leader is an example of issue amplification in response to niche party competition by significantly increasing the anti-immigrant tone (difference $= 0.18$, $p = 0.00$). This strategy suggests that the İYİP viewed the ZP's rise as a direct threat to the İYİP's voter base, which, like the ZP, appeals to nationalist and right-leaning voters. In this competitive landscape, the İYİP appears to have calculated that it could retain or regain support by intensifying its rhetoric and focusing heavily on immigration. Indeed, this was clearly stated by multiple interviews that we conducted at İYİP headquarters in

---

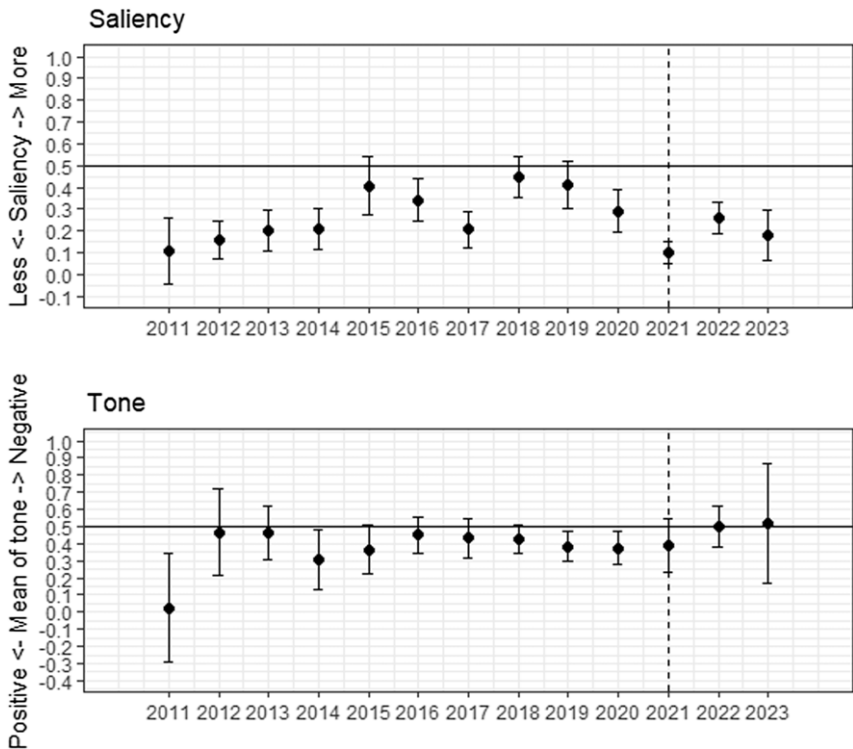[6] We thank the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

Figure 1. Overall tone and saliency of the Syrian refugee issue in parliamentary group speeches (2011–2023).
Note: The straight horizontal line indicates the midpoint of the scale. The dashed vertical line indicates the year that the ZP was established. For each year, 95 percent confidence intervals are reported.
 Graphs prepared using ggplot2 (Wickham 2016).

October 2022. According to one representative, the ZP is the major reason why they adopted the anti-immigrant rhetoric:

> Ümit Özdağ set the benchmark for the immigration debate. The İYİP had no choice but to adjust its policy accordingly. In fact, Özdağ became the reference point – going against his narrative would create a disconnect between our party and our voters. If he hadn't been there, our rhetoric on this issue would have been much softer. We must acknowledge that public sentiment has shifted significantly since 2019, and now, no political party aiming for electoral success can afford to ignore the rise of anti-immigration sentiment.

İYİP officials confirmed efforts to lead anti-immigrant rhetoric, including conspiratorial tones and deportation plans. The party's rhetoric aimed to frame immigration as an urgent threat that demanded immediate and stringent action.

Similarly, the main opposition party, the CHP, adopted a more anti-immigrant position, although the difference is statistically insignificant. That is, the CHP's leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, incorporated more anti-immigrant themes in a smaller
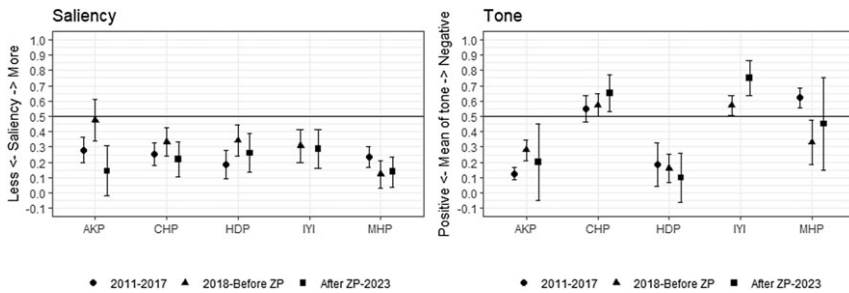
Figure 2. Saliency and tone in three periods.
Note: Darker horizontal black lines indicate scale midpoints. For each period, 95 percent confidence intervals are reported.

proportion of his speeches. The one-sample t test indicates that the tone of the CHP's speeches, which was already anti-immigrant (over 0.5) even before the ZP's emergence ($t(30) = 2.1$, $p = 0.05$), now became notably more anti-immigrant, moving from 0.57 to 0.65. However, the mean difference of the CHP's tone before and after the ZP is not statistically significant (difference $= 0.08$, $p = 0.91$). Also, although the difference is statistically insignificant, the refugee issue became less salient in the CHP's party speeches after the emergence of the ZP (difference $= -0.12$, $p = 0.37$). The CHP co-opted the ZP's tone while reducing salience to avoid alienating its liberal base. This strategy can be theorized as issue cooptation, where a mainstream party increases its position on a niche issue to co-opt voters from a niche party while simultaneously reducing the saliency of that issue in its overall platform to avoid alienating its core supporters.

In interviews with CHP representatives, their dual strategy became evident. They emphasized finding a middle ground – a balanced position rooted in both legal principles and humanitarian considerations. This strategy allowed them to appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, addressing the concerns of those favoring stricter immigration policies while maintaining a discourse centered on "legality." In these interviews, the CHP's concerns about mass immigration, cultural change, and demographic shifts were clear, but strategic calculations largely shaped their approach to attracting votes. Responding to rising anti-immigration sentiment, their position appeared less ideologically fixed and more a tactical maneuver within the electoral marketplace. A quote from the CHP representative aligns with this strategic shift:

> We acknowledge that Turkey cannot sustain hosting such a large refugee population under current economic and social conditions. However, we also reject any approach based on racism or discrimination. Our goal is a voluntary and dignified return, coordinated through international diplomacy and agreements with the Syrian government. This issue must be addressed through legal frameworks and a responsible, planned transition.

This statement captures the CHP's balancing act – expressing concerns about the sustainability of mass migration while framing their position within legal and

humanitarian discourse. It reflects their attempt to appeal to both anti-immigration voters and pro-humanitarian supporters, primarily responding to voter concerns without fully committing to hardline rhetoric. This became evident in 2023 when the CHP's presidential candidate aligned with ZP rhetoric during the run-off and adopted a more hardline stance on migration issues to attract voters.

Before entering the People's Alliance with the AKP, the MHP had been the most anti-immigrant party. However, the party changed its stance from anti-immigrant to pro-immigrant after joining the alliance (difference = –0.29, $p = 0.00$). Unexpectedly, the ZP's emergence barely affected the MHP's tone since the difference is statistically insignificant. Moreover, the MHP's slight movement towards the midpoint and large confidence intervals after the ZP's establishment suggest a quest for issue repositioning against the rise of a new rival. The salience of the refugee issue also decreased in party leader Devlet Bahçeli's speeches after joining the alliance, although the change is statistically insignificant (difference = –0.12, $p = 0.17$). In summary, the MHP de-emphasized immigration to maintain coalition alignment.

Moreover, in interviews, MHP representatives emphasized their influence over immigration as part of the government. One notable comment was that they were "short of putting microchips into Syrians," which indicates a strong sense of control despite the moderated public stance. This rhetoric seems designed to reassure their supporters that while they might not be as vocal about being anti-immigrant as before, they are still actively managing immigration, just in a more behind-the-scenes way. The MHP's shift was about staying relevant and competitive without directly confronting the ZP over anti-immigrant sentiment. By de-emphasizing the refugee issue and signaling their control through subtler means, the MHP aimed to maintain its coalition position and voter base without escalating the conflict on a highly salient issue already championed by their new political rival.

Lastly, the HDP and AKP, which occupy different policy spaces to the ZP, maintained their pro-immigrant positions, although their responses to the ZP's emergence differed. The HDP, occupying a left-wing, pro-minority, and pro-immigrant policy space, chose to maintain its pro-immigrant stance even after the rise of the ZP. The HDP's response can be theorized as issue reinforcement, wherein the party remains committed to its position despite the shifting political landscape. This strategy is less about electoral recalibration and more about solidifying its identity and ideological consistency to retain its core voter base. In the interviews that we conducted with HDP representatives, they underscored the importance of sticking to principles. They drew comparisons with their support for Kurdish rights, arguing that issues like empathy, legality, and justice mattered more to them than simply seeking votes. Therefore, the HDP's stance was more about maintaining moral and ideological integrity than engaging in a strategic shift to win voters. This approach was particularly striking given the fact that anti-immigrant sentiments are quite widespread, even among Kurdish communities. Our HDP interlocutors were aware of this but still chose to prioritize values over pragmatism, emphasizing solidarity with marginalized groups, including refugees, as a consistent part of their party's identity. They emphasized moral consistency, even at electoral cost, linking refugee empathy with past Kurdish displacement.

The AKP used issue avoidance, reducing refugee saliency to manage rising discontent while preserving its religious framing (difference = –0.33, $p = 0.02$). This

response is likely a risk management tactic designed to control the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment without directly confronting or alienating either side of the immigration debate. Publicly endorsing a pro-refugee position could alienate voters swayed by the ZP's anti-immigrant rhetoric, while taking a more anti-immigrant stance would conflict with the AKP's long-standing narrative of humanitarian responsibility rooted in Islamic values, potentially alienating its own base. Increasing saliency (difference $= 0.19$, $p = 0.03$) and negative tone towards Syrian refugees (difference $= 0.15$, $p = 0.00$) between the first and second periods (until the establishment of the ZP) could stem from worsening economic conditions as well as Turkey's ongoing cross-border operations and growing tension between Kurds in Northern Syria.

As incumbents, the AKP could shape discourse through silence and media dominance. By downplaying the issue, the AKP avoids reactive policymaking while retaining flexibility to adjust its stance based on shifting political dynamics. Unlike opposition parties, which must actively differentiate themselves to gain electoral traction, incumbents can afford to disengage, knowing that state institutions and pro-government media can manage public perceptions in their favor.

Interviews with AKP representatives reinforced this perspective, revealing how the party frames the Syrian refugee situation through a distinct ideological and civilizational lens. The AKP does not see migration purely as a crisis but as part of a broader political and strategic vision. One interlocutor explained:

> The refugee issue is not something we want to "solve" in the way people often expect. The moment you frame it as a problem to be solved, the immediate thought is forced solutions – deportation, removal. That is not an approach we even want to consider. Instead, this is a reality that societies must learn to live with, to integrate, and to see the opportunities it brings rather than just the burdens. The real failure is in how we talk about refugees, treating them as objects, as if we are discussing an abstract issue rather than the fate of human beings. That dehumanization is something I find deeply troubling, a societal failure that should make us all uncomfortable.

This ideological framing aligns with the AKP's broader goal of positioning Turkey as a leading power in the Muslim world. He further stated:

> We see Muslim migration not just as a humanitarian obligation but also as an opportunity to extend Turkey's influence and strengthen its ties with the broader Muslim world. This is not merely a crisis to be managed but a strategic reality that shapes regional dynamics and future alliances.

The AKP's approach suggests that, beyond electoral concerns, its refugee policy is embedded in a vision of regional leadership, soft power expansion, and long-term demographic shaping. By strategically avoiding direct engagement with the refugee debate, Erdoğan and the AKP neutralize its immediate electoral risks while preserving their broader ideological project (for a summary of the findings, see Table 1).

To sum up, our analysis indicates that the ZP's emergence has particularly affected those parties that share the same policy space in Turkey's electoral marketplace but

Table 1. Summary of findings

Party	Position (pro-immigrant to anti-immigrant)	Saliency (de-saliency to amplification)	Strategy
İYİP	Anti-immigrant	Amplification (30 percent of speeches)	Issue amplification. The İYİP shifted towards a harder anti-immigrant stance (tone)
AKP	Moderate pro-immigrant	De-saliency (reduced mention in parliamentary speeches)	Issue avoidance. The AKP decreased the saliency of the refugee issue to manage political risks while maintaining its pro-refugee stance without amplifying the issue
CHP	Moderate anti-immigrant	De-saliency (reduced emphasis despite tone shift)	Selective issue cooptation. The CHP incorporated more anti-immigrant rhetoric but limited the salience of the issue, balancing voter appeal and ideological risks
HDP	Pro-immigrant	Amplification (consistent emphasis on refugee rights)	Issue reinforcement. The HDP maintained its pro-immigrant, human rights-focused stance and continued to emphasize the issue, appealing to its core base of left-wing and minority voters
MHP	Moderated anti-immigrant (shift from midpoint to below 0.5)	De-saliency (less mention)	Issue repositioning. The MHP softened its anti-immigrant position and decreased its emphasis on the issue after joining the People's Alliance with the AKP, focusing instead on broader nationalist issues

in different ways. The results show that, until the ZP appeared on the scene, the overall tone of immigration-related speeches and the saliency of immigration as a topic both remained under the midpoint, indicating that political discourse in Turkey was more pro- than anti-immigrant. After the ZP's rise, however, immigration became a more polarizing and salient issue across the political spectrum. The most significant shifts occurred among parties competing for nationalist and conservative voters. The İYİP, for instance, intensified its anti-immigrant rhetoric in its discourse, signaling a clear attempt to outflank the ZP on the issue. Similarly, the MHP, once the most anti-immigrant party, moderated its stance after forming the People's Alliance with the AKP and subsequently downplayed the refugee issue following the ZP's rise, possibly to avoid internal conflicts within the coalition. On the other hand, the CHP selectively adopted more anti-immigrant rhetoric to capture disaffected voters, but it strategically reduced the salience of the issue to avoid alienating its liberal and progressive base.

The AKP, meanwhile, chose to largely lessen the refugee issue in its public speeches, signaling a form of issue avoidance to manage reputational risks while maintaining its pro-immigrant stance in line with its Islamic humanitarian narrative. The HDP remained consistent in its pro-immigrant stance, reinforcing its ideological commitment to human rights and minority protection without shifting its position or

reducing the salience of the issue. Overall, the ZP's emergence heightened the debate on immigration, forcing established parties to recalibrate their strategies to either compete with or distance themselves from the ZP's hardline stance. This has led to a more fragmented and polarized immigration discourse in Turkish politics, with parties responding through a mix of strategies depending on their electoral and ideological priorities.

Conclusion

The growing influx of migrants from war-torn and economically deprived regions to wealthy countries has fueled anti-immigrant attitudes and bolstered support for anti-immigrant parties. This shift has pressured established political parties to respond to these new rivals. Unlike in Western countries, Turkey did not have a strong anti-immigrant party before 2021, despite significant refugee flows and widespread anti-immigrant sentiments among the voting-age population. However, this changed with the emergence of the anti-immigrant ZP, especially as immigration became a central issue following the closely contested 2019 elections. This shift in Turkish migration politics presents new research opportunities.

Our study provided a supply-side analysis of the immigration issue in Turkey, examining how political parties adjusted their rhetoric on immigration and how salient the issue became. Using a mixed-methods approach, we found that Turkey's established parties previously balanced anti-immigrant rhetoric with pro-immigrant frames, acting as gatekeepers against rising anti-immigrant sentiments. However, the rise of the anti-immigrant ZP has compelled established parties to adjust their stance on immigration strategically.

In line with Harmel and Svåsand's (1997) performance hypothesis and expanding upon the PSOT (Meguid 2005, 2023), we show that established parties change their ideological positions when a potential rival emerges that can take votes from them. While the ZP's emergence threatened its rivals in the electoral market, parties in different spaces either ignored or intensified their pro-immigration stance. The ZP emerged from within the opposition, and in Turkey's intensely polarized political climate, the dynamics of political competition suggest that governing parties are less inclined to directly address this challenge, whereas opposition parties felt the impact more acutely.

As demonstrated in this study, political party strategies have revolved around two key dimensions: the salience they assign to the issue; and the tone they adopt in addressing it. By fine-tuning these variables, parties balanced voter demands with reputational risks. Indeed, after the foundation of the ZP, major established opposition parties, particularly the İYİP and CHP, shifted towards a more anti-immigrant stance. The İYİP moved further in this direction due to their similar constituency with the ZP both in salience and tone (issue amplification); the CHP shifted its tone by incorporating more anti-immigrant rhetoric while deliberately reducing the salience of the issue, seeking to capture disaffected voters without alienating its progressive base (selective issue cooptation). The MHP softened its tone and downplayed the salience of immigration to preserve coalition cohesion (issue repositioning), while the HDP maintained a consistent pro-immigrant tone with high salience (issue reinforcement). The AKP, on the other hand, adopted an issue

avoidance strategy, reducing the salience of immigration in its discourse and maintaining a moderate pro-immigrant tone in line with its religious humanitarian narrative, thereby minimizing the risk of alienating its core voters. These diverging responses highlight the varied ways that established parties fine-tune their strategies, reshaping immigration discourse in response to niche party pressures.

While this study provides insights into how established parties adjust their immigration stances in response to the rise of anti-immigrant parties like the ZP, it has certain limitations. One significant factor not fully explored is the influence of broader economic conditions, such as rising inflation and the 2021 Afghan migration crisis, on public opinion and party strategies. These economic pressures may have contributed to heightened anti-immigrant sentiments, which could further shape party responses. Our analysis primarily focused on the dynamics following the emergence of the ZP, measuring how established parties reacted to this new competitor in the political arena. Nevertheless, our coding framework offers broader application for cross-national comparison. Our findings demonstrate that this new measurement tool effectively captures subtle variations in immigration discourse. For instance, the widely used Manifesto Project dataset has limitations, as it is only beginning to measure immigration attitudes after its fifth codebook version specifically. Therefore, several earlier studies had to use multiculturalism and the national way of life as proxy variables (e.g. Abou-Chadi et al. 2022; Spoon and Klüver 2020).

However, the intersection of economic crises and shifting party attitudes toward immigration requires further investigation. Future research should examine how economic challenges like unemployment and inflation interact with voter preferences to influence party positioning. Moreover, the methodological limitations of this study should be acknowledged. While the holistic grading approach provided nuanced insights into the tone and salience of party rhetoric, its reliance on parliamentary speeches and elite interviews may have overlooked grassroots mobilization and informal party communications that also shape party strategies. Incorporating a wider range of data sources, including social media analysis and public opinion surveys, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of party responses to niche party pressures.

We also emphasize the role of institutional dynamics. Had Turkey retained its parliamentary system, the ZP's emergence and positioning would likely have differed. The high electoral threshold and coalition requirements would have pressured the ZP to moderate its rhetoric or build alliances sooner. In contrast, the current presidential system – with its two-round structure and emphasis on strong, personalized leadership – amplified polarizing messages and elevated Özdağ's visibility. While the ZP might still have emerged under a parliamentary model, its strategy, rhetoric, and impact would have been significantly shaped by those institutional constraints.

In sum, niche parties like the ZP reshape party competition even in authoritarian settings. By extending Meguid's PSOT to include reputational risks and coalition politics, our findings offer a more comprehensive framework for analyzing how parties respond to the rise of anti-immigrant challengers. Complex responses require multifaceted, context-aware analysis.

References

Abou-Chadi T, Cohen D, and Wagner M (2022) The centre-right versus the radical right: the role of migration issues and economic grievances. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**(2), 366–384.

Abou-Chadi T and Krause W (2020) The causal effect of radical right success on mainstream parties' policy positions: a regression discontinuity approach. *British Journal of Political Science* **50**(3), 829–847.

Apaydın S and Müftüler-Baç M (2022) The Syrian refugee crisis through the lenses of Turkish political discourses: an analysis of deliberations in the Turkish Parliament. *International Migration* **60**(5), 217–236.

Arnesen S, Christensen DA, and Finseraas H (2023) Look to Denmark or not? An experimental study of the Social Democrats' strategic choices. *Electoral Studies* **84**, 102629.

Ayan Musil P (2022) *The Transformation of Kurdish and Islamist Parties in Turkey: Consequences for Regime Change.* Cham: Springer.

Aydemir N (2023) Framing Syrian refugees in Turkish politics: a qualitative analysis on party group speeches. *Territory, Politics, Governance* **11**(4), 658–676.

Aytürk İ and Esen B (2021) The far right, labor unions, and the working class in Turkey since the 1960s. *The Middle East Journal* **75**(4), 511–531.

Baldini G, Bressanelli E, and Massetti E (2022) Back to the Westminster model? The Brexit process and the UK political system. *International Political Science Review* **43**(3), 329–344.

Bale T, Hadj Abdou L, and Geddes AP (2022) Centre-right parties and immigration in an era of politicisation. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**(2), 327–340.

Balta E (2023) Populist radical right beyond Europe: the case of Islamic nativism in Turkey. *Journal of Language and Politics* **22**(3), 378–395.

Balta E and Demiralp S (2024) Paradox of optimism: opposition coordination against autocratic incumbents in Turkey's 2019 and 2023 elections. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 1–21. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2024.2338504 (accessed 19 May 2025).

Balta E, Elçi E, and Sert D (2023) *The 2023 Elections and Migration Debate in Turkey.* İstanbul: Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Available at https://tr.boell.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/the-2023-elections-and-migration-debate-in-turkey-report.pdf (accessed 19 May 2025).

Brown K, Mondon A, and Winter A (2023) The far right, the mainstream and mainstreaming: towards a heuristic framework. *Journal of Political Ideologies* **28**(2), 162–179.

Brumat L and Geddes A (2023) Refugee recognition in Brazil under Bolsonaro: the domestic impact of international norms and standards. *Third World Quarterly* **44**(3), 478–495.

Bulut AT and Hacıoğlu N (2021) Religion, foreign policy and populism in Turkish politics: introducing a new framework. *Democratization* **28**(4), 762–781.

Carling J (2023) The phrase "refugees and migrants" undermines analysis, policy and protection. *International Migration* **61**(3), 399–403.

Castelli Gattinara P (2020) The study of the far right and its three E's: why scholarship must go beyond Eurocentrism, electoralism and externalism. *French Politics* **18**(3), 314–333.

Çarkoğlu A and Elçi E (2021) Populist attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Turkey. In Uslaner E and Holtug N (eds), *National Values and Social Cohesion.* London and New York: ECPR Press, 203–218.

Çarkoğlu A and Kalaycıoğlu E (2021) *Elections and Public Opinion in Turkey: Through the Prism of the 2018 Elections.* New York: Routledge.

Dahlström C and Sundell A (2012) A losing gamble. How mainstream parties facilitate anti-immigrant party success. *Electoral Studies* **31**(2), 353–363.

Demker M and Odmalm P (2022) From governmental success to governmental breakdown: how a new dimension of conflict tore apart the politics of migration of the Swedish centre-right. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**(2), 425–440.

Dennison J and Geddes A (2022) The centre no longer holds: the Lega, Matteo Salvini and the remaking of Italian immigration politics. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**(2), 441–460.

Downs A (1957) An economic theory of political action in a democracy. *Journal of Political Economy* **65**(2), 135–150.

Elçi E (2019) The rise of populism in Turkey: a content analysis. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* **19**(3), 387–408.

Elçi E (2022) Göçmenlere Karşı Tutumların Parti Tercihlerine Etkisi: Türkiye Örneği. *İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* **21**, 46–73.

Esen B and Gumuscu Ş (2016) Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly* **37**(9), 1581–1606.

Fisunoğlu A and Sert DŞ (2019) Refugees and elections: the effects of Syrians on voting behavior in Turkey. *International Migration* **57**(2), 298–312.

Gerim G (2023) Far-right nationalist politics in Turkey: division of the nationalist camp between the MHP and the Good Party. In Orofino E and Allchorn W (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Non-Violent Extremism*. New York: Routledge, 273–287.

Guia A (2016) The concept of nativism and anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe. EUI MWP. Available at https://hdl.handle.net/1814/43429 (accessed 20 November 2024).

Hadj Abdou L and Ruedin D (2022) The Austrian People's Party: an anti-immigrant right party? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**(2), 385–404.

Harmel R and Svåsand L (1997) The influence of new parties on old parties' platforms: the cases of the Progress Parties and Conservative Parties of Denmark and Norway. *Party Politics* **3**(3), 315–340.

Hawkins KA (2009) Is Chávez populist? Measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies* **42**(8), 1040–1067.

Hawkins KA, Jenne EK, and Castanho Silva B (2021) Mapping populism and nationalism in leader rhetoric across North America and Europe. *Studies in Comparative International Development* **56**(2), 170–196.

Hernández-Morales A and Cokelaere H (2024) 5 Things to know about the EU election results. *Politico*, 10 June 2024. Available at https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-election-results-2024-things-to-know/ (accessed 25 December 2024).

Heyne L and Manucci L (2021) A new Iberian exceptionalism? Comparing the populist radical right electorate in Portugal and Spain. *Political Research Exchange* **3**(1), 1989985.

Hutter S and Kriesi H (2022) Politicising immigration in times of crisis. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48**(2), 341–365.

İnanç YS (2023) Sinan Ogan: the anti-refugee ultra-nationalist shaking up Turkey's election. *The Middle East Eye*, 15 May 2023. Available at https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sinan-ogan-turkey-election-anti-refugee-ultranationalist (accessed 15 September 2024).

Jönsson A, Balan A, and Hartell E (2021) Analytic or holistic? A study about how to increase the agreement in teachers' grading. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice* **28**(3), 212–227.

Krause W, Cohen D, and Abou-Chadi T (2023) Does accommodation work? Mainstream party strategies and the success of radical right parties. *Political Science Research and Methods* **11**(1), 172–179.

Krippendorff K (2004) *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kurtoglu Eskisar GM and Durmuslar T (2023) Responses of far right parties to refugees in hybrid regimes: the case of MHP in Turkey. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **49**(5), 1229–1250.

Meguid BM (2005) Competition between unequals: the role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success. *American Political Science Review* **99**(3), 347–359.

Meguid BM (2023) Adaptation or inflexibility? Niche party responsiveness to policy competition, with evidence from regionalist parties. *European Journal of Political Research* **62**(2), 355–376.

Moise AD, Dennison J, and Kriesi H (2024) European attitudes to refugees after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *West European Politics* **47**(2), 356–381.

Mudde C (2004) The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition* **39**(4), 541–563.

Mudde C (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde C (2012) *The Relationship between Immigration and Nativism in Europe and North America*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

Mudde C (2021) Populism in Europe: an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism (The Government and Opposition/Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019). *Government and Opposition* **56**(4), 577–597.

Mudde C (2022) The far-right threat in the United States: a European perspective. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* **699**(1), 101–115.

Newcomb JS (1977) The Influence of Readers on the Holistic Grading of Essays. PhD dissertation, University of Michigan.

Öney B (2018) Constitutional debate in Turkey: from dominant party heresthetical strategy to single-party hegemony, quantitative text analyses. *Mediterranean Quarterly* **29**(3), 33–54.

Öney B and Selck TJ (2017) What was the "Kurdish opening" all about? A qualitative text analysis of parliamentary group speeches in Turkey. *Ethnicities* **17**(6), 771–791.

Pappas TS (2016) Distinguishing liberal democracy's challengers. *Journal of Democracy* **27**(4), 22–36.

Poushter J, Huang C, and Clancy L (2022) Spotlight on Poland: negative views of Russia surge, but ratings for U.S., NATO, EU improve. PEW Research Center, 22 June 2022. Available at https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/22/spotlight-on-poland-negative-views-of-russia-surge-but-ratings-for-u-s-nato-eu-improve/ (accessed 20 May 2025).

Rathgeb P and Wolkenstein F (2022) When do social democratic parties unite over tough immigration policy? *West European Politics* **45**(5), 979–1002.

Rohrschneider R and Whitefield S (2017) Party positions about European integration in Germany: an electoral quandary? *German Politics* **26**(1), 83–103.

Rooduijn M (2018) What unites the voter bases of populist parties? Comparing the electorates of 15 populist parties. *European Political Science Review* **10**(3), 351–368.

Rooduijn M, De Lange SL, and Van Der Brug W (2014) A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe. *Party Politics* **20**(4), 563–575.

Santana A, Zagórski P, and Rama J (2020) At odds with Europe: explaining populist radical right voting in Central and Eastern Europe. *East European Politics* **36**(2), 288–309.

Secen S, Al S, and Arslan B (2024) Electoral dynamics, new nationalisms, and party positions on Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Turkish Studies* **25**(3), 419–449.

Sert D and Danış D (2021) Framing Syrians in Turkey: state control and no crisis discourse. *International Migration* **59**(1), 197–214.

Spoon J-J and Klüver H (2020) Responding to far right challengers: does accommodation pay off? *Journal of European Public Policy* **27**(2), 273–291.

Staudt A and L'Ecuyer P (2020) *icr: Compute Krippendorff's Alpha* [R package version 0.6.2]. Available at https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=icr (accessed 20 May 2025).

Swan BW and Ward M (2024) Trump's immigration crackdown is expected to start on day 1. *Politico*, 18 November 2024. Available at https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/18/immigration-100-days-trump-executive-action-00189286 (accessed 5 December 2024).

Van Spanje J (2011) The wrong and the right: a comparative analysis of "anti-immigration" and "far right" parties. *Government and Opposition* **46**(3), 293–320.

Wickham H (2016) *ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis*. Cham: Springer.

Yanaşmayan Z, Üstübici A, and Kaşlı Z (2019) Under the shadow of civilizationist populist discourses. *New Diversities* **21**(2), 37–51.