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UNMASKING ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSE

Bilkent University 2025

UNMASKING ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSE: ITS IMPLEMENTATION AS A TOOL FOR POLARIZATION IN TURKEY AND HUNGARY

A Master's Thesis

by
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Ankara
September 2025

To my dear family

UNMASKING ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSE: ITS IMPLEMENTATION AS A TOOL FOR POLARIZATION IN TURKEY AND HUNGARY

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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MERT KAYA ÖNGELEN

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Political Science.

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ABSTRACT

UNMASKING ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSE: ITS IMPLEMENTATION AS A TOOL FOR POLARIZATION IN TURKEY AND HUNGARY

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While polarization literature identifies cultural cleavages and grievances as creating political divisions, it has not systematically examined how anti-gender discourse functions as a tool of polarization. Drawing on Somer and McCoy's (2019) framework of pernicious polarization, I examine how elites deploy anti-gender rhetoric as a mechanism to deepen societal divisions. Combining polarization with theories of securitization and stigmatization, I analyze the diversity of tools adopted by political elite. The research comparatively analyzes Turkey and Hungary in order to explore similarities and differences. This thesis attempts to fill the gap in the literature by bringing a gender perspective to polarization literature by deciphering the rhetoric of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Süleyman Soylu, and Viktor Orbán, three political figures who frame reproductive and sexual rights and gender identity as existential threats to national identity and family values. Drawing on theories of gender, polarization, securitization, and stigmatization, the study investigates how these leaders' discursive strategies legitimize exclusionary policies. I combine systematic content analyses of speeches through MAXQDA coding with Foucauldian discourse analysis. This dual approach made it possible to identify recurring themes, framing patterns, and the emotional tone embedded within anti-

gender rhetoric. Two different types of graphs are included for all three leaders in this thesis: word trends and code trends. Findings reveal that Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán share a common ideological framework, however, they operationalize anti-gender discourse differently. By integrating empirical evidence with theoretical insights, this thesis contributes to understanding the role of gendered narratives in sustaining electoral power and deepening societal divides.

Keywords: Anti-gender, Discourse, Stigmatization, Securitization, Polarization

ÖZET

CİNSİYET KARŞITI SÖYLEMİN ANALİZİ: TÜRKİYE VE MACARİSTAN'DA KUTUPLAŞTIRMA ARACI OLARAK KULLANIMI

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Kutuplaşma literatürü kültürel ayrımları ve kinciliği siyasi bölünmelerin kaynağı olarak tanımlasa da, cinsiyet karşıtı söylemin bir kutuplaşma aracı olarak nasıl işlediğini sistematik biçimde incelememiştir. Bu tez Somer ve McCoy'un (2019) yıkıcı kutuplaşma çerçevesinden yola çıkarak, elitlerin cinsiyet karşıtı retoriği toplumsal bölünmeleri derinleştiren bir mekanizma olarak nasıl kullandığını incelemektedir. Çalışmada kutuplaşmayı, güvenlikleştirme ve damgalama teorileriyle birleştirerek siyasal elitin benimsediği araçların çeşitliliği analiz edilmektedir. Araştırma, Türkiye ve Macaristan'ı karşılaştırmalı olarak inceleyerek benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tez, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Süleyman Soylu ve Viktor Orbán'ın söylemlerini çözümleyerek kutuplaşma literatürüne toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifi kazandırmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu üç siyasi aktör, üreme ve cinsel hakları ile toplumsal cinsiyet kimliğini ulusal kimlik ve aile değerlerine yönelik varoluşsal tehditler olarak çerçevelendirmektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyet, kutuplaşma, güvenlikleştirme ve damgalama teorilerinden yararlanarak, çalışmada bu liderlerin söylemsel stratejilerinin dışlayıcı politikaları nasıl meşrulaştırdığı araştırılmaktadır. Çalışmada, liderlerin konuşmalarına yönelik sistematik içerik analizini MAXQDA kodlaması ile Foucaultcu söylem analizini

kullanılmıştır. Bu ikili yaklaşım, cinsiyet karşıtı retorikte tekrar eden temaları, çerçeveleme kalıplarını ve duygusal tonu tespit etmeyi mümkün kılmıştır. Tezde her üç lider için iki farklı türde grafik yer almaktadır: kelime eğilimleri ve kod eğilimleri. Bulgular, Erdoğan, Soylu ve Orbán'ın ortak bir ideolojik çerçeveyi paylaştığını, ancak cinsiyet karşıtı söylemi farklı biçimlerde işlevselleştirdiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Ampirik verileri kuramsal içgörülerle birleştirerek, bu tez toplumsal cinsiyet temelli anlatıların seçimsel gücü sürdürmede ve toplumsal bölünmeleri derinleştirmede oynadığı rolün anlaşılmasına katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet-Karşıtı, Söylem, Damgalama, Güvenlikleştirme, Kutuplaşma

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
AKP	Justice and Development Party
CHP	Republican People's Party
Fidesz	Hungarian Civic Alliance
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
FETÖ	Fethullahist Terrorist Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT

In recent years, polarization has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges for contemporary democracies. Scholars have shown how deepening divides undermine democratic trust, corrode institutions, and foster antagonistic worldviews between government and opposition supporters (Somer & McCoy, 2019; Abromowitz, 2019). Yet, despite the growing body of literature on polarization, little attention has been paid to how specific discourses and issue frames serve as tools to entrench these divisions. This thesis addresses that gap by focusing on anti-gender discourse as a mechanism of polarization.

Anti-gender discourse is part of the anti-gender movement, which is a cultural and political phenomenon that has sparked harsh controversies and exacerbated tensions. This campaign, embedded in resistance to progressive gender tenets and policies, has evolved into a focal topic for people and groups backing against what they regard as hazards to traditions, norms, and values. As the discourse encompassing gender-related matters heightens, so does societal polarization, bringing about a complex interplay of values and political ideas. Lately, scholars commenced to study right-wing mobilization against gender, which helps the perspective on right-wing mobilization against progressive movements to be analyzed in different ways; such as affects and emotions (Ahmed, 2004; Wodak, 2015), opposition response (Saccà & Massidda, 2018), ethno-sexism and cultural panic (Dietze, 2016), occidental and European identity (Dietze, 2010) and, discursive level (Dietze & Roth, 2020).

In this research, the focus will be more on the discursive level of anti-gender aspect of right-wing politics; however, other areas mentioned above matter since anti-

gender speeches encompass various topics. There are important moments in recent history regarding anti-gender movement in terms of how anti-gender campaigning negatively affected the progressive feminist and LGBTQ+ movements, such as ceasing activity of Gender Studies in Eötvös Lorand University in Hungary and Turkey's decision to leave the Istanbul Convention. Thus, recent trajectories of Hungary and Turkey in terms of the implementation of anti-gender discourse and the negative impact on progress achieved by feminist and queer movements will be the main focus of this thesis.

In the year of 2018, the Rectorate of Eötvös Lorand University in Hungary received a document, including the details of many legal changes drafted for the Hungarian system of education. Besides small details and changes in academic procedures, the document also contained a warning which demanded the MA program in Gender Studies not to issue any diplomas for upcoming students and cease activity. Despite the massive uproar against the Hungarian government, their decision was final on the basis that the Gender Studies department fails not only to make graduates employable, yet fails to be a discipline in Hungarian academia (Barat, 2022). The rationale behind this is the tendency of right-wing parties in Europe to conceptualize gender as a political ideology, similar to communism, and they aim to either destroy gender or inflict fear upon people by referring to gender as gender ideology, agenda, or genderism (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

To this date, there are not many examples where anti-gender movement is capable of depriving rights earned by the feminist and queer movement, besides the US, where abortion is legally banned in some states, not country-wide. However, Hungary is one of the rare cases where anti-gender propaganda is entrenched in government practices and policies, aiming to erase gender and queer identity. In addition to the shutdown of Gender Studies department in Eötvös Lorand University, Hungarian government rejected The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, which intends to eliminate gender-based violence. The Hungarian government did not ratify the convention on the basis that it included the word "gender" and the condition that favored immigrants who experienced

discrimination due to their sexuality or gender identity ("Hungary's parliament blocks domestic violence treaty", 2020).

With this much focus placed on gender, it demonstrates that the word gender has become more than a concept of socially constructed characteristics; it now signifies their anxiety and reforms that anti-gender movement is against (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). In a similar way, Erdoğan proclaimed their decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention (IC), which marked Turkey as the first Council of Europe country to ever leave an international human rights treaty. Even though there were international and national activists criticizing Erdoğan's decision, it did not change the outcome (Callamard, 2021). One of the reasons why the Turkish government decided to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention is that it "normalizes homosexuality" (Callamard, 2021) as if homosexuality is something not to be normalized, and this would further legitimize discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey. Despite Hungary, Turkey did not mention their reason to leave being the usage of the word "gender," however, Turkey should still be marked as an anti-gender government since it is against rights earned by the feminist and queer movement, and attempts to put millions of women and LGBTQ+ Turkish citizens at risk by withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention. Another way to categorize this is when governments clearly mark themselves as against "gender ideology," yet in the case of Turkey, that is not available.

The way pro-government writers attack on progressive gender gains, such as the IC, is quite similar to anti-gender vocabulary practiced by the global anti-gender activists (Özkazanç, 2022). Moreover, according to Özkazanç, pro-government writers did not start criticizing the IC until they were influenced by Eastern-European anti-gender activists (2022), which demonstrates how anti-gender activists, despite language barrier, could influence each other worldwide. Besides the IC, the combination of anti-LGBTQ+[1], anti-abortion, and anti-feminist discourses implemented by the AKP government further demonstrates why Turkey is a great example of an anti-gender government and renders it possible to compare how

[1] Here, I use the term anti-LGBTQ+ in order not to use biphobia, transphobia, homophobia individually, anti-LGBTQ+ encompasses anything under the umbrella itself.

politicians use stigmatization based on gender and queer identity to further polarize the country and consolidate their voters through anti-gender movement in Hungary and Turkey.

Anti-gender movement, then, could be put as being against the gender as it is and, as an attempt to define a gender they wish to counter, even though gender does not have any intent to be a propaganda or an agenda forced on the nation. The concept of gender, as studied by feminist scholars, is that gender is not a fixed identity that is assigned at birth (which is sex); rather, gender is fluid, consciously or unconsciously instituted via "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). In a sense, whether one is born or becomes a woman (Beauvoir, 1949) could be explained with Butler's view on gender, since it is the experience that matters; the difference between a woman or a man becomes arbitrary and mundane because it relies on abandoning the repetitive style of being a man or a woman constructed by society. The societal aspect of gender is crucial, as social temporality plays an important role regarding expectations of women or men in different regions.

As Margaret Mead gives the example of Samoa, one could see that gender roles are not loci around the globe, in Samoa, they have four categories for gender: female, male, fa'afafine, and fa'afatama (Mead, 2001). Having still a biological understanding of female and male in Samoa, they did not, however, restrict their people to two possible genders; Samoan people were allowed to transition socially and to become either a fa'afafine (feminine) or fa'afatama (masculine). Unlike Samoa, most industrialized countries have a naturalistic view of sex and gender and dictate, specifically women, to act as subordinates to men, lacking the phenomenological aspect of gender, which argues that womanhood is not a natural fact, rather it is a historical situation since the body itself becomes the bearer of cultural taboos and meanings (Beauvoir, 1949).

How gender has come to be understood or treated vastly differently from its original meaning, as explained above, requires thinking about discourse and representation. As Foucault highlights, discourse is a plethora of speeches and statements which yield a language to represent the knowledge regarding "a particular topic at a

particular historical moment. …Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language" (Foucault qtd. in Hall, 1977, p. 44). Furthermore, if powerful enough, a discourse is then capable of providing its own language and representation of a topic, even though it may not be true. In a sense, discourse is capable of yielding a post-truth cultural meaning of a topic in order to regulate and organize the way society reacts to that particular topic. What is meant by the power of discourse needs to be understood in a way that the power of discourse can stigmatize a group of people or even a person in a certain way and within the scope of a "regime of representation" (Hall et al., 2013, p. 222). With the implementation of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis in this thesis, I aim to explore how gender is viewed and represented by political actors through their discourse and how the stigmatization and securitization of women and LGBTQ+ is used as a polarizing tool.

Polarization originates from the political ideology one has, and studying polarization attempts to search for extremes in such political views as liberal versus conservative, right versus left. These dualisms are simplistic and practical; however, there are scholars who are critical of this simple division implemented for voters' ideology since the regional differences require an in-depth analysis over simplistic definitions of left versus right (Smith, 2009; Toshkov & Krouwel, 2022). Scholars of polarization also attempt to bring new concepts into the field, Abramowitz and Webster, to develop the concept of polarization, created a novel abstraction, which is negative partisanship (2016). To illustrate, voters do not become more polarized by clinging to their party or political stance, rather, they build up negative attitudes against the opposition party.

In addition to negative partisanship, similar research conducted in 2016, demonstrates voters tend not to vote on the basis of the candidates capability to be a successful president because they vote by focusing on which party the candidate belongs to (Abromowitz, 2016). Although to some extent polarization is beneficial for democracies since it provides clues for voters to choose among candidates and consolidates the voters of parties (Enyedi, 2006, 2008), polarization has negative consequences for social cohesion and democracies. If it reaches extreme levels,

polarization triggers each extreme side to view the other as a threat to the nation or themselves and puts the legitimacy of the other in question (Schmitt, 1996).

The central research question of this thesis is: How do the governments of Turkey and Hungary use anti-gender discourse as a political tool of polarization, and in what ways do these discourses converge or diverge across the two contexts? This question is significant because, while polarization and anti-gender discourse have each been studied extensively, their intersection has received far less systematic attention in comparative perspective. Existing scholarship on pernicious polarization, such as Somer and McCoy (2019), emphasizes how elites exploit grievances, delegitimize opponents, and mobilize identity-based antagonisms. Yet, their treatment of gender remains limited. Although they acknowledge that moral debates around gender and sexuality are particularly polarizing because they resist compromise, they do not examine how political elites strategically construct and deploy anti-gender discourse. By addressing this gap, this thesis demonstrates how political leaders in Turkey and Hungary use anti-gender rhetoric not only as a cultural grievance but also as a mechanism of stigmatization and securitization, thereby placing gender at the core of pernicious polarization.

As the aim of this research is to demonstrate the accumulation of discriminatory practices, I chose Turkey and Hungary as cases of pernicious polarization (McCoy & Somer 2019) and combine content analysis of leaders' campaign speeches with discourse analysis. Content analysis allows me to show which words and themes are used repeatedly by leaders, providing systematic evidence of recurring patterns across all speeches. It also establishes an empirical foundation that mitigates selective interpretation. Discourse analysis helps me capture how these words and themes are used to construct meaning, normalize exclusion and legitimize power relations.

By bringing gender dynamics into the study of polarization, this research advances existing theory in two important ways. First, it demonstrates that polarization is not only structured around partisan or ethnic cleavages but can also be intensified through discourses that target sexuality, reproduction, and gender identity issues

which are fundamentally tied to moral values and cultural cleavages. Second, it shows that anti-gender rhetoric functions as more than symbolic politics: it operates as a concrete mechanism of stigmatization and securitization that deepens societal divisions. In doing so, this thesis extends the framework of pernicious polarization by revealing how elites mobilize gendered narratives as polarizing tools, thereby broadening the analytical scope of polarization theory to include the politics of gender and sexuality.

The design of the thesis is as follows: in Chapter 2, I will present the literature review, which situates the thesis at the intersection of two main scholarly fields: the literature on the anti-gender movement and the literature on societal polarization. While existing studies on the anti-gender movement highlight its transnational character and its use as a mobilizing tool by right-wing leaders, scholarship on polarization emphasizes how elites manipulate social cleavages to consolidate power. Chapter 3 reviews historical background chapter, since grasping the current political climate requires attention to the historical trajectories of gender politics in both countries. For Turkey, this includes the AKP's long-term discursive shifts regarding women's reproductive rights and the securitization of LGBTQ+ people. For Hungary, it encompasses the legacy of state socialism, women's restricted political participation, and the evolving legal and cultural attitudes toward queer communities, culminating in Prime Minister Orbán's consolidation of power and his framing of "gender ideology" as a national threat. This historical grounding contextualizes the contemporary use of anti-gender discourse.

Then, Chapter 4 introduces the methodology, which combines content analysis with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). The content analysis is conducted through MAXQDA, including word frequency trends and thematic coding, to provide systematic evidence of recurring frames and rhetorical strategies. FDA is combined with contemporary concepts from securitization theory and stigmatization studies. Additionally, empirical analysis is conducted through MAXQDA, including word frequency trends and thematic coding, to provide systematic evidence of recurring frames and rhetorical strategies. Additionally, empirical analysis is conducted

through MAXQDA, including word frequency trends and thematic coding, to provide systematic evidence of recurring frames and rhetorical strategies.

Having laid out the methodology, Chapter 5 presents the analysis chapter examining the implementation of anti-gender discourse in both cases, through a comparative discourse analysis of political leaders' speeches and texts. The chapter will highlight how Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán implement gendered narratives to mark women and LGBTQ+ communities as outsiders or threats, legitimizing exclusion. The outcome of this thesis is to demonstrate that in Turkey and Hungary, anti-gender discourse functions as a political tool of polarization, wherein stigmatization and securitization redefine gender and sexuality as existential threats by ostracizing them. This strategy enables governments to consolidate power by polarizing voters. Chapter 6, concludes by combining these findings, reflecting on their implications for broader debates on polarization, and the global rise of anti-gender movement, transphobia, and misogyny.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding the Foundations of Polarization

Although voters, similar to the research had been done before, are not very-well informed in terms of public policy and the agenda of the party they are voting for (Abramowitz, 2010), there is a global trend in the world regarding the increasing polarization (Gu & Wang, 2021) over the past few decades. There has been a dramatic escalation of political polarization on a global scale, which can be regarded as a disruptive impact on societies worldwide. This rise of polarization is observable not only in developing countries but in advanced democracies, as well. Abramowitz and Webster, to elaborate more on the polarization, offered a new term, negative partisanship (2016). In a sense, people are not becoming more polarized by sticking to their own ideology or party; rather, they develop negative attitudes towards the opposition party. Additionally, according to the research that was conducted in 2016 in the United States, voters do not vote on the basis of the candidates' capability to be a successful president; rather, they mostly focus on which party the candidate belongs to (Abramowitz, 2016). High level of consistency regarding group voting between the 2012 and 2016 elections in the United States further proves the point that voters are polarized to the point that the possibility of changing their minds is relatively low (2016).

While political scientists agree on the fact that ideological polarization has recently increased in the United States during recent decades, meaning that people stick to their Democrat or Republican identity more strictly, there is one thing that political scientists working on polarization do not share the same point of view in terms of how polarization is organized. On the one hand, some political scientists advocate for the idea that polarization has an impact on voters' behavior and its level is not

limited to political elites (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Abramowitz, 2015; Brewer & Stonecash, 2015; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2018; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Hetherington and Weiler (2009) expand this perspective by emphasizing the role of authoritarian tendencies in shaping partisan divides: voters with authoritarian worldviews gather around conservative politics, while non-authoritarians align with liberal politics, thereby reinforcing polarization through cultural and value-based cleavages. On the other hand, others argue that this political polarization is mostly about political elites since mass polarization does not exist and cannot be the result of elite polarization (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2005; Baldassari & Bearman, 2007; Levendusky, 2009).

For the purposes of this thesis, the precise level at which polarization occurs, whether predominantly among elites or within society at large, is not the main topic of discussion. Rather, I rely more on the types of polarization identified in the literature and how these forms shape political discourse and democratic backsliding. Mason (2015) attracts attention to the related phenomenon of social sorting. Mason argues that partisan identity has become tightly aligned with their own social identities, such as race, religion, lifestyle, and other markers, and that people dislike and distrust members of the other party even when they agree on policy. Social sorting, therefore, produces polarization that is social and emotional in character: it is about who belongs with whom in society, not only about disagreement on discrete policy questions. This form of social polarization is especially relevant to the present study because it links political cleavages to broader social identities, precisely the mechanism through which anti-gender discourse can solidify partisan divides.

Another strand of the literature is call pernicious polarization Somer and McCoy (2019). Pernicious polarization emphasizes how elite behavior, grievance politics, and divisive discourse can produce sustained threats to democratic norms and institutions. Somer and McCoy define this category in terms of polarization that goes beyond disagreement and becomes actively destructive: elites exploit grievances, delegitimize opponents, and mobilize identity-based antagonisms that erode democratic contestation. Consequently, they foreground the role of political leaders and elites in producing and amplifying these dynamics, a point of direct intersection

with this thesis, which examines elite speech and strategic anti-gender rhetoric. However, they acknowledge gender-related issues as part of cultural grievances without engaging with them in depth. “Cultural grievances around the rights of specific religions, *kulturkampf*s between secularized and conservative lifestyles, as well as moral debates around gender and sexual rights or issues of sex and death can become the most polarizing because moral issues are the most difficult on which to compromise” (McCoy & Somer, 2019, p. 242). While they acknowledge that gender can operate as one of the grievances or cleavages, their treatment of gender is limited and under-theorized. This is the conceptual gap that the present thesis aims to address: existing accounts of pernicious polarization note the salience of grievances but do not trace systematically how anti-gender discourse is produced by political elites, how it maps onto social issues, and how it functions to mobilize affective and moral antagonisms combined with securitization and stigmatization.

By acknowledging that anti-gender is part of the pernicious polarization, I will shed light on how it exists and what polarization leads to in Turkey, and Hunger will be examined thoroughly. Since even the most trivial in-group characteristic has an impact on how people view in-group members positively and out-group members negatively (Billig & Tajfel, 1973), it is vital to elaborate on how politicians polarize their voters by dehumanizing or stigmatizing the others. The more salient a group member’s affiliation is, the more biased they are towards the other group, and most importantly, that salience depends on the member’s loyalty towards the group according to Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes’s experiment (2012). In this respect, applying this insight to political science and polarization, it is possible to argue that the more loyal a voter is to the party or the party leader, the more biased they are towards the opposite party.

Although the polarization literature provides how polarization is measured or whether polarization increases or decreases, the literature barely touches upon the importance of gender (including LGBTQ+) within polarization. For this reason, I attempt to demonstrate the role of gender, sexuality, and gender identity within polarization. One of the reasons why gender has become more and more mainstream

and popular is the anti-gender movement, which is also cited as anti-gender ideology and anti-genderism. It usually criticizes specific features of gender theory, which they refer to as "gender ideology" (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018, p. 1) and supports traditional views of gender roles. Even though anti-gender movement might differ in different countries, there are transnational patterns and cross-border similarities that need to be mapped and tracked.

There are articles attempting to analyze the anti-gender movement in Europe as a counter to progressive politics (Matejková & Mihálik, 2023; Petö, 2015; Wodak, 2015) and a comprehensive book written by Kuhar and Paternotte with chapters on Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, and Poland (2018). According to most scholarly work, Catholicism in Europe works as a glue by connecting the groups that are against the so-called "gender ideology." similarly, in Turkey, Islamism and conservatism are essential factors similar to Catholicism when it comes to preserving traditional roles and values (Kancı, Çelik, Bekki & Tarcan 2023). However, one crucial point in terms of anti-gender movement in Turkey is that it does not have a clear agenda as in Europe and the United States, and in the Turkish language the difference between gender (*toplumsal cinsiyet*) and sex (*cinsiyet*) is not known on a societal level since neither Erdoğan nor Soylu mentions gender in their speeches.

Another important set of sources further expands on these dynamics by examining how symbolic glue, polarization, and elite-driven strategies shape the trajectory of anti-gender politics in both Europe and Turkey. Verloo's (2018) notion of "symbolic glue" highlights how anti-gender discourse operates as a unifying tool, binding together diverse political and social actors by framing feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equality as common enemies. This framing is not limited to Western European contexts but resonates globally, as Kováts and Põim's (2015) analysis shows in relation to how anti-gender discourse becomes instrumental in polarizing societies, deepening divides between liberal-democratic and conservative-authoritarian camps. Wodak's (2015) insights into the "politics of fear" further illuminate how these discourses mobilize affective registers of fear, disgust, and moral panic, rendering "gender ideology" an existential threat to the cultural and

political order. Bracke and Paternotte (2016) contribute by tracing the religious genealogy of this discourse, showing how Catholic-rooted mobilizations against "gender ideology" have been transnationally exported and recontextualized. Similarly, Özkazanç (2020) notes that no grassroots "anti-gender" movement had existed in Turkey; instead, the AKP regime itself has pushed a blatantly anti-gender-equality agenda as part of its illiberal project, demonstrating how political elites can directly manufacture and institutionalize anti-gender discourse rather than merely amplifying existing social conservatisms. Taken together, these perspectives show how anti-gender discourse travels across contexts, but also how its form and force depend on the interplay between transnational templates, elite strategies, and domestic political opportunity structures.

The issue in the polarization literature is where gender and sexuality stand in it and how it fails to bring up anti-gender issues mentioned above. According to McCoy, Somer and Rahman, polarization is triggered when a group within society, for our example women or LGBTQ+ individuals, achieves power or unites to achieve cultural, economic or social goals (2018). In this regard, both the feminist movement and queer movement have the potential to trigger polarization. There are also studies examining racial resentment against people of color as they achieve status in societies (McCoy & Somer, 2019). It is necessary to think about how queer and feminist movement could lead to religious, male, conservative resentment. Since queer individuals and women have become more visible both economically and socially, the anti-gender advocates have begun to imagine a loss of status (economic or social) (Mutz, 2018). This reactionary dichotomy of feminist/queer movement and anti-gender movement, which leads to polarization, might be explained by the dominant status group theory (King and Wheelock, 2007; Sidanius and Pratto, 2001), as well. The grievance towards women or queer people then forms hostility, stereotypes, and ultimately animosity, making it an opportunity for politicians to utilize this emerging cleavage to further polarize in the most effective ways through the underpinnings of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Connected to my research, McCoy and Somer (2019) also emphasize on Turkey and Hungary as examples of countries with polarization. They directly discuss Turkey as

a key example, highlighting the 2013 Gezi protests as a prominent instance of opposition counter-mobilization. While mass-driven and multi-dimensional, these protests ultimately intensified polarization and prompted authoritarian responses. Hungary, on the other hand, is mentioned more indirectly in the broader set of countries experiencing polarization, particularly in relation to fragmented or weakened opposition and the rise of dominant political elites. However, recent research on Hungary highlights the deepening connection between democratic backsliding, elite strategies, and mass-level affective polarization. Hajnal (2025) implies that a large share of the variation in voters' evaluations of the government's performance is independent of their partisan identity, this highlights that government and opposition divides are structured not only by party loyalty yet also by different evaluations of democracy itself, with opposition supporters coalescing around liberal democratic norms while government supporters align with the ruling party regardless. In addition, Gessler and Wunsch (2025) emphasize that elite-level ideological polarization can impede opposition unity in Hungary, while limited mass support for ideologically diverse coalitions further constrains joint mobilization.

Beyond party loyalty and elite fragmentation, polarization theory points to underlying societal grievances, including the cultural conflicts where questions of gender and sexuality often become central. According to the theory of polarization (McCoy & Somer, 2019), polarizing practices are built on differences and cleavages in society, and they identify three grievances: political grievances (such as disputes over democratic institutions, power-sharing, or election legitimacy), economic grievances (such as inequality in wealth distribution, unemployment, or regional economic disparities), and cultural grievances (such as conflicts over religion, language, ethnicity). Thinking about the state of gender in polarization, the cultural grievances might be the closest one which could include gender (241); however, even though McCoy and Somer mention "gender and sexual rights" (241), they connect it to the polarization based on moral issues, even though gender is much more comprehensive than morality.

On a global level, gender has come to be viewed as a threat to society, family, and religion (Corredor, 2019). As much as feminism, the LGBTQ+ movement, and anti-

gender movement gained momentum in the political sphere, according to what I have searched, there are only two articles directly engaging with gender and polarization. The first one engages with the public opinion on Trans Law in Spain (Sánchez-Holgado, Arcila-Calderón & Gomes-Barbosa, 2023). They elaborate on the results; however, they do not focus on how anti-gender discourse is used to deepen polarization by politicians. Rather, they analyze what people think about Trans Law in Spain. Second, Ondercin and Lizotte (2021) find that women show higher levels of affective polarization, meaning deeper emotional divides driven in part by stronger partisan identities and issue commitments such as abortion. Unlike these studies, my thesis goes further by examining not only how gender and anti-gender narratives contribute to polarization, but also how AKP and Fidesz mobilize these narratives to strengthen their voter base and stigmatize and securitize identities along lines of gender, sexuality, and tradition. This comparative focus on narrative deployment in Turkey and Hungary fills a gap left by existing literature.

Having summarized the literature on polarization and how polarization occurs in general, as this research's main focus will be on Turkey and Hungary, I will provide short and concise summaries of the literature regarding queer and feminist studies in Turkey and Hungary. A few texts have been written regarding the queer people under the Turkish government, Birdal (2013) offers a global conceptualization of queer movement in Turkey, which contributed to my understanding of the differences and similarities between LGBTQ+ communities in Turkey and other countries. Yıldız (2014), on the other hand, gives an account of queer visibility in Gezi Park resistance, by elaborating on the crucial role of queer activists, he argues that the media de-emphasizes queer elements of Gezi Park events. Kramer (2022) provides an account of the state intervention in LGBTQ+ bodies, and defines Turkey as a distinct case of LGBTQ+ movement since in Turkey, laicism fails to separate education, politics, and business associations from Islam (Kramer, 2022, p. 62; Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008, p. 14).

In terms of AKP, Caner Hazar argues that AKP should be examined as pre-2007 and afterwards, since according to him, AKP followed pragmatic ways in two different time periods (Hazar, 2018). Around 2003, Hazar argues that the change in the law on

meetings, demanded by the European Union, further accelerated the development of the LGBTQ+ movement in Turkey (169), in Istanbul, the visibility of pride movement also created an environment where the unheard LGBTQ+ people could demand their rights and show that they are "here," the famous slogan *buradayız ayol*. Hazar further suggests that post-2007 AKP defined the citizenship in a neo-Ottomanist way that did not imagine LGBTQ+ people as part of it, in turn, Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat said publicly that "LGBT rights, similar to environmental rights, were not a part of a 21st century constitution but a 22nd century one" (Hazar, 170).

Views regarding queer and feminist issues have been no different in the Hungarian political context. Since Fidesz is inseparable from the figure of Viktor Orban (similar to Erdoğan and AKP), Orban's views shape Fidesz and its supporters' opinion on the LGBTQ+ movement and feminism (Bozoki, 2016). There are scholars arguing that Orban's politics are about the glorious past of Hungary and dissatisfaction with the contemporary situation due to liberal elites, signaling feminism and queer studies, as well (Molnar, 2021). According to Molnar (2021), this so-called nationalist victim storytelling legitimizes Orbán and Fidesz through taking on the role of a savior which is going to protect Hungary's culture from contemporary threats.

In addition to Molnar, Nyyssönen and Metsälä (2021) elaborate on Hungary's right-wing politics through the usage of "liberal," even though liberal is not a strictly defined concept, the way it is used in Hungarian right-wing context signifies criticism towards minority rights, global trends, political correctness and multiculturalism, with gender and anti-gender sentiments recently being added to that list (275). Bíró-Nagy (2017) also concentrates on the meaning of words used by Orbán and Fidesz, specifically how they define the nation-state and what the nation-state's components are. The slogans such as "Hungary for Hungarians," "our nation-state" do not refer to all Hungarians; rather, they represent heterosexual, nationalist, traditionalist Hungarians who live their lives in a particular way that is not condemned by Orbán (Bíró-Nagy, 2017). Fekete takes it further and argues that Orbán's understanding of nationalism and savior of the country can be extended to Europe since Fekete emphasizes that Orbán is not only going to save his country

from contemporary queer and feminist threats, but also saving Europe from those particular threats to defend Europe's historic and cultural composition (Fekete, 2016, p. 43, Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). To summarize, according to the scholars working on Hungary, Orbán's populism and nationalism can be categorized as the anti-thesis of two threats; first, contemporary threats, such as globalization, European Union and liberal movements, second, the radicalized others, feminists, queers and local minorities in Hungary.

To summarize, Anti-gender discourse should not only be understood as a cultural backlash but also as a deliberate polarizing strategy deployed by political elites. By framing feminism and LGBTQ+ rights as existential threats to the family, religion, and nation, leaders elevate cultural questions into conflicts that divide society along rigid "us versus them" lines. Rather than simply reacting to social change, they construct a narrative of crisis that transforms cultural differences into political antagonisms and converts abstract grievances into emotional divides: defenders of tradition, morality, and national integrity on one side, and alleged agents of moral decline on the other. This framing reinforces political identity through emotions such as fear, disgust, and outrage, ensuring that opposition actors; feminists, queer activists, or liberal figures are cast as symbols of betrayal and enemies of the national community. Polarization is thereby intensified because disagreement is no longer about policies but about belonging itself: who is part of the nation and who is excluded from it. By fusing gender and sexuality with questions of loyalty and survival, anti-gender discourse narrows the space for compromise and makes polarization a reinforcing loop, turning cultural grievances into partisan weapons, magnifying distrust, and transforming gender and sexuality into symbolic battlegrounds that anchor the broader architecture of polarization.

2.2. Beyond Partisan Divides: The Gendered Politics of Polarization

While polarization research has provided the way partisan identities shape political behavior, it has paid comparatively little attention to the role of gender, sexuality, and gender identity in intensifying polarization. The escalation from generalized partisan hostility to targeted hostility against specific social groups, such as women and LGBTQ+ individuals, requires us to examine not only structural cleavages but

also the discursive strategies through which political leaders transform cultural issues into existential threats. This section serves as part of the theoretical framework on which I rely, besides providing the latest studies regarding the anti-gender politics, securitization, and stigmatization that are related to my research.

In this thesis, I argue that a comprehensive understanding requires an integrated theoretical framework. While securitization theory alone can identify the speech acts and political moves that frame certain groups as existential threats, it does not account for the emotional intensification, the gendered performance, or the stigmatizing logic that make these moves effective in polarizing societies. Similarly, research on emotional securitization[2], gender ideology, and stigmatization provides important but partial insights. Bringing these perspectives together enables an analysis that reveals both the structural logic and the affective, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of anti-gender discourse. This integration is necessary because the cases examined here, Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán, do not implement securitization independently; they weave together threat construction, emotional mobilization, gendered narratives, and moral exclusion into a single political strategy. Examining these elements together not only fills a gap in existing literature, where these theories are not combined, but also provides a new insight into the way anti-gender rhetoric operates as a multi-layered tool of polarization.

Further enriching my theoretical framework is Myra Marx Ferree's (2004) concept of "soft repression," which describes non-violent strategies used by actors in civil society to silence or marginalize challengers. Ferree identifies three key forms of soft repression: ridicule (mocking terms like "feminazi" to diminish challengers), stigma (creating a negative collective identity to discourage association with a movement), and silencing (systemic exclusion from public forums like the media). This concept is particularly relevant as it moves beyond state-centric models of repression to explain how cultural battles are fought within civil society. The discursive tactics

[2] Emotional securitization refers to the strategic use of emotions, such as fear, disgust, or anxiety in securitizing rhetoric to heighten perceived threats and mobilize public support for exceptional measures. While securitization can be grounded in strategic discourse or rational arguments, emotional securitization highlights how emotions are deliberately mobilized to intensify perceived threats (Ganz, 2023).

employed by Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán can be understood as forms of soft repression, where ridicule and stigma are strategically mobilized to prevent the formation of oppositional consciousness and silence dissenting voices in the public sphere.

In addition to stigmatization, one of the main concepts for this analysis is the theory of securitization, which Soylu relies on the most. Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka (2016) define securitization as a procedure involving speeches, the construction of a threat, and the legitimization of extraordinary measures. Methodologically, securitization is explained here by three points: (1) specific designation of an existential threat, (2) identification of a referent object (e.g., "the family," "the nation"), and (3) asking for extraordinary action or justification of exceptional measures (52). The rhetoric of Süleyman Soylu, for instance, provides a clear case where security vocabulary is systematically combined with stigmatization, marking LGBTQ+ individuals not merely as morally deviant but as existential threats on par with terrorism or hostile external forces.

While Balzacq et al. outline the structure of securitization, emotional securitization, conceptualized by Ganz (2023), lays out a pivotal approach for its mechanism. Ganz argues that emotions like disgust and national pride are mobilized on purpose to justify the exclusion of minorities. In this thesis, the type of securitization that occurs most of the time is emotional securitization since it is detected when securitizing moves are combined with such appeals as fear, disgust, moral outrage, linguistically signaled through metaphors, moralizing terms, or dehumanizing references. Orban's invocation of forcing gender reassignment surgery for children, even though it does not exist in reality, to securitize children exemplifies this, as it is designed to provoke fear and reinforce moral binaries.

Adding onto this emotional dimension, Gaufman's (2023) research on gendered vulnerability and fragile masculinity describes the specific performance within these narratives. Gaufman shows how right-wing politicians rhetorically feminize the nation to cast themselves as its masculine protectors, a framing evident in Erdoğan's repeated juxtaposition of "aile" (family), "Türkiye," and "Allah" against "LGBT"

and “Kemal” (the opposition leader). These securitizing performances often target an abstract enemy “gender ideology” rather than explicitly naming LGBTQ+ individuals (518). Graff and Korolczuk (2022) argue that this abstraction is important to anti-gender movements, while Heikkilä & Kmak (2023) show how child protection rhetoric and “vulnerabilization” tactics position certain subjects (the child, the family) as deserving of care, casting others as unworthy or dangerous. The discursive tools which reinforce these frames are what Mehran et al. (2024) term “gendered framing amplifiers,” by relying on Mehran’s terms, emotionally charged words such as “child,” “family,” “terror,” and “Allah” can also be regarded as gendered framing amplifiers which are deliberately paired with “LGBT” or “gender ideology” to construct affective connotations.

To make sure that these associations are identified from the primary sources rather than selectively chosen, this thesis employs discourse analysis to detect recurring themes and patterns in leaders ’speeches. This step mitigates confirmation bias by grounding the qualitative interpretation in systematically observed frequency patterns, in addition to analyses in individual quotations. Finally, the exclusionary endpoint of this integrated strategy is illuminated by Neelam’s (2022) work on the victim/threat binary. Neelam’s framework helps explain how Erdoğan’s discourse frames LGBTQ+ individuals simultaneously as threats to Turkish family and morality and as illegitimate victims, thereby justifying their exclusion from the national community.

In conclusion, this integrated framework demonstrates that anti-gender politics is not a monolith but a sophisticated political and discursive strategy. In addition to Ferree’s stigma, Balzacq et al. provide the structural model of securitization; Ganz explains its emotional drivers; Gaufman clarifies its gendered performance; Graff and Korolczuk identify its ideological target; Heikkilä & Kmak uncover its protective rhetoric; Mehran et al. show its linguistic amplifiers; and Neelam reveals its ultimate exclusionary logic. Examined together, they explain not just what anti-gender leaders say, but how and why these messages resonate, providing a more concrete understanding of their role in political polarization.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I examine the preliminary progress of political polarization, shaped by a long trajectory of historical developments, which affects gender and LGBTQ+ rights in Turkey and Hungary. Both countries' contemporary policies cannot be totally grasped without understanding the accumulation of such historical events as early feminist movements and socio-political upheavals, to transformations in national identity, which have laid the foundation for today's polarized climates in both Turkey and Hungary. In Turkey, the history of state-led discourses on reproduction, gender roles, and minority securitization under government sheds light on an ingrained historical continuity of controlling women's roles and bodies as well as stigmatizing LGBTQ+ identities within a polarized society. In a similar fashion, Hungary's historical legacy, from early 20th-century gender norms, socialist-era social policies, to the nationalist and conservative resurgence under Fidesz, illustrates the way polarization has been equipped to redefine gender expectations and restrict LGBTQ+ rights. By tracing these historical accumulations, this chapter deciphers how using anti-gender discourse to polarize is not a sudden rupture, yet a progression embedded in national histories, enabling governments to deploy gender and sexuality as arenas for broader political and demographic agendas, thus reshaping social relations and identity in both contexts.

3.1. Turkish Anti-Gender History

The history of Turkey encompasses not only the process of nation-building yet also the systematic exclusion of certain groups, concerning gender, sexual orientation, and identity, contributing to deepening social divisions. These divisions have contributed to deepening polarization over time, as state policies and public discourse have often reinforced binaries of appropriate versus "deviant" citizenship. This section demonstrates a historical overview of Turkey with a particular emphasis on the experiences of women and minority groups, culminating in a focused examination of LGBTQ+ histories. The analysis is built around three key periods: the era preceding the 1980 coup, the transitional period leading up to the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, and the contemporary period from 2002 to the present. It begins with an outline of Turkey's political and social developments up to 1960, shedding light on how the marginalization of certain groups laid the groundwork for the polarized dynamics that characterize Turkish society today.

The subsequent sections delve into the pre-coup period to trace the origins of LGBTQ+ visibility in Turkey, examining how queer identities began to emerge in public and cultural discourses. The analysis then transitions to the impact of the AKP's rise to power and the growing influence of political Islam on Turkey's social and political landscape. This period witnessed the dual forces of state-driven narratives and grassroots activism in shaping the construction of LGBTQ+ identities. The AKP's contrasting stances toward LGBTQ+ people, ranging from ambivalence to overt hostility, will be thoroughly examined with the self-representation and resistance strategies of LGBTQ+ groups. The incorporation of specific queer people and their lived experiences is crucial for this thesis, making sure that an intersectional perspective encompasses not merely gender but gender identity, sexual orientation, and modes of expression, as well.

3.1.1. From Modernization to Marginalization: Gender, Sexuality, and the Republican Project

This section will examine how the Turkish government, historically, produced heteropatriarchy[3] by juxtaposing compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 2011) against the 'other' womanhood, which fails to comply with heteropatriarchal expectations. This juxtaposition leads to a hierarchical order within society, where non-heterosexual people and women become unknowable outside of the heteropatriarchal hierarchical order. To fully encapsulate this type of governmentality, it is vital to shed light on the genealogy of heteronormativity, starting from 1923 (since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey). V. Spike Peterson suggests that heteropatriarchal governmentality occurs through four different components; women are defined as the biological reproducers, state intervention in traditional and normative familial unit, women are expected to conform to ideals of the nation as sisters and mothers, the combination of militarism, heterosexual masculinist agenda, and the denial of homosexual relations (Peterson, 2013, pp. 59-65).

This type of governmentality operates within problematic social relations that seem so natural and fixed; one possible example could be the existence of nationalist and militaristic myths of Turkish government in public education in the early 1930s and how textbooks of that particular curriculum manipulate students by arguing that Turks have the best military, Turks are soldiers by birth (Kancı & Altınay, 2007). The best and ideal woman is one who gives birth to that particular Turkish soldier (2007). This mentality is problematic on two different levels; first, the Turkish government defines womanhood the way it wants, rather than leaving it to the choice of a woman. Second, this practice's reflection in society turns into a misogynistic practice that families and social groups join in, deciding on women's future through family, peer pressure, and societal oppression. How governments' actions resonate with society is important for this thesis's main topic, as well, since the way Turkish and Hungarian leaders implement their discourse results in homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia within society (2007).

[3] Heteropatriarchy is a structure where heterosexuality and male dominance are seen as the norm, leading to the marginalization of women, LGBTQ+ people, and non-conforming gender identities.

Between 1923 and 1960, the republican elite around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk pursued a progressive project to build a modern, secular nation-state modeled on Europe, with modern institutions, a European-style legal code, and secular governance (Esen, 2014). This marked a sharp break from the Ottoman Empire's multi-ethnic and multi-religious legacy, requiring citizens to reconstruct their past and embrace a new Turkish identity. Yet this raised questions of who qualified as a Turk, a definition shaped by state institutions, cultural norms, and family as carriers of national values. The resulting model of citizenship was framed less on race alone than on nationalism and culture, though racial undertones remained (Bali, 2006).

The making of the Turkish state was rooted in an assemblage of nationalistic, cultural, and racial ideologies. This is represented by the slogan propagated during the single-party period: "One language, one culture, one ideal." This phrase encapsulated the nationalistic agenda promoted by the republicans, as highlighted by İnce (2012). The stress on unity through language, culture, and shared ideals signified an effort to homogenize the population and repress diversity. The Turkification agenda attempted to discipline[4] individuals and communities who failed to abide by the ideal Turkish identity. This meant the ones who spoke non-Turkish languages such as Ladino, Greek, Armenian, and Kurdish were going to be excluded (Aslan, 2007).

Attempts to Turkify the public sphere went beyond language and culture, combining legal, educational, and economic measures planned to marginalize non-Turkish elements. For example, minorities were often excluded from full participation in public life through such discriminatory policies and economic pressures as the Wealth Tax (Varlık Vergisi) which disproportionately targeted non-Muslim minorities (Bayır, 2016) and further ingrained the boundaries of who might belong to the republic's vision of Turkishness (Egorova & Parfitt, 2013). In this context, the formation of Turkish national identity can be seen as a process of exclusion as much as inclusion. While it attempted to create a cohesive national identity, it

[4] Discipline refers to a control mechanism, and normalization exercised by institutions, social norms, or structures of power to shape behavior, identities, and bodies.

systematically ostracized and alienated groups which were not suitable for the narrowly described criteria of Turkishness.

Besides minorities, the disciplining of women also emerged in the First Republic. Male elites, including Atatürk, repeatedly defined what Turkish women should be, drawing on Ziya Gökalp's contradictory views. Gökalp emphasized women's role in modernization through education and work, yet also stressed chastity and domestic roles (Gökalp, 1968). Atatürk similarly argued that women should raise generations safeguarding Turkish intelligence and strength (Özsu, 2010, p. 68). However, women were actively participating in politics, as Yeşim Arat (1989) tells, their participation was shaped by men and patriarchy itself, and the unequal power dynamics between men and women was a restricting force at macro level, yet this was also encouraging for women to participate in politics at micro level (p. 117).

There were also substantial gains for women's rights, such as the 1926 Turkish Civil Code, which represented a landmark moment for women's legal status. It abolished polygamy, granted women equal rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody, and replaced religious courts with secular ones that applied uniform family law. Yet these reforms were unevenly benefited from different women; while urban women gained revolutionary public visibility and legal grounds and resources, most of the rural Anatolian women continued to be bound by customary practices, with polygamous unions continuing covertly and women excluded mainly from village councils or public sphere (Göle, 1996; Kocabıçak, 2023).

3.1.2. From Silence to Struggle: The Roots of Queer Activism

Prior to the 1970s, lesbian and gay culture in Turkey, as in much of the world, primarily existed within bars, parks, hammams, and certain coffee shops. The establishment of the gay movement in Turkey can be attributed, in part, to Ibrahim Eren, a member of the Environment and Health Organization in İzmir, who played a pivotal role in fostering support groups where lesbians and gays could convene and share their experiences (Shevtsova, 2021, p. 46). However, Eren's efforts, along with those of others attempting to strengthen the queer community, encountered significant challenges due to the prevailing historical conditions in Turkey at the

time. The 1980s saw a military coup in Turkey, which marked a severe decline in individual rights and the activities of non-governmental organizations. Following the coup, all queer groups in Turkey were disbanded, and Ibrahim Eren, along with several others, was compelled to flee to Europe under escalating military pressure and repression (Fishman, 2013). Shortly after this, in 1981, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Turkey of the military government banned ″men wearing women's clothes" to perform, showing how military governments could shape womanhood and manhood, and the way people dress could become a code of conduct (Çetin, 2015).

The coup in Turkey not only impacted the queer movement but also instilled reluctance among feminist, anti-militarist, and various other political groups due to fears of military government persecution (Ilaslaner, 2014). In response, Ibrahim Eren came back to Turkey in 1983 and sought to unify queer, feminist, and environmental activists with the aim of founding the Radical and Democratic Green Party. This attempt, though, was ultimately unsuccessful; the first practical action in mobilizing public support was the 1987 hunger strike initiated by transgender individuals, who faced the greatest tensions with law enforcement among activist groups in Turkey (Shevtsova, 2021, p. 47). Although the hunger strike was disregarded by the government, the hunger strike allowed transgender people to demonstrate their experience with police violence, and it brought the support of some Turkish celebrities and artists (Çetin, 2015). The 1987 hunger strike became a milestone event for the queer movement in Turkey, as it directly responded to police violence primarily targeting transgender individuals but also affecting broader queer and feminist communities.

3.1.3. The Pride That Couldn't March: 1993's Silenced Rebellion

In 1993, a small group of queer activists united an emerging organization in Istanbul, later taking the name of Lambdaistanbul. They commenced meeting secretively in one of their accountant friends' bureau and formulated a brave plan: to organize the ″Cinsel Özgürlük Etkinlikleri" (Sexual Freedom Events) which was going to last three days, coming to the climax of a Pride march on 2 July 1993. Organizers prepared with excitement and even organized a press conference in a Beyoğlu coffee

shop as a prelude to the event (Tar, 2022). As one of the activists narrates, the media fueled the public in order to create a hostile climate against queer people through ridiculing their existence and juxtaposing it as opposed to religion, “You don't eat snails in a Muslim neighborhood, sir, this is not Brazil.”[5] (KaosGL, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, since the Istanbul Governor's Office thought that the event was against customs and values (Tar, 2022), they did not allow activists to participate in the Sexual Freedom Events in 1993. The night before the event, some of the activists were arrested in their houses; moreover, activists also faced social exclusion and stigma from their neighbors. The Turkish government didn't even allow international participants, who were going to join the event, to arrive in Istanbul; some of them were expelled at the airport, some of them were dragged on the streets (KaosGL, 2019). Activists who were being detained in the police station found out that their files in the police station were labelled as "eşcinsel terörist" (homosexual terrorist) (Tar, 2022, p. 1), attempting to equate homosexuality with terrorism. Thus, the 1993 attempt to hold Istanbul's first Pride march was met with state repression, media-fueled homophobia, and social stigma, marking a pivotal moment of suppression, collective resistance, and terrorism associated with queers in Turkey's queer history.

This moment of state-led repression in 1993 set the tone for the challenges that queer activism would continue to face, even as LGBTQ+ movements gained visibility alongside major political shifts, such as the AKP's rise to power in 2002. In 2002, Turkish people witnessed two different phenomena: first, the ongoing vivid and varied LGBTQ+ movements across the country, and second, the AKP's (Justice and Development Party) rise to power. Since AKP is a conservative party, the rise of LGBTQ+ movements and AKP could seem contradictory, however; a respectable portion of Turkish people, including left-leaning ones, at first appreciated not only LGBTQ+ movements yet the rise of AKP to power as well (Savcı, 2021, p. 1). The reason behind the nature of some left-leaning voters could potentially be explained by the hope they had, which is the possibility of liberalization of the nation from its patriarchal, militarist, and dominantly secular essence, *vesayet* (tutelage). In addition

[5] Müslüman mahallesinde salyangoz yenmez, yok şöyle, yok efendim burası Brezilya değil.

to this hope, the way AKP presented itself by differentiating itself from previous Islamist parties could be helpful to understand why and how AKP has gained this much dominance (İnan, 2018). This so-called uniqueness of AKP stems from its pro-globalization, pro-West, and pro-business views at the time. Additionally, these features could also be attributed to the rise of the term moderate Islam which had been used incessantly for AKP (Somer, 2007; Mecham 2004; Rabasa, A., & Larrabee, F. S. 2008). As later AKP decided not to be an advocate for globalization and Westernization, the use of moderate Islam does not apply to AKP anymore, proving that AKP is not supportive of LGBTQ+ rights (Kongar, 2018).

3.1.4. From Reform to Control: The Early AKP Years (2002–2010)

Erdoğan's shift from a liberal figure with his interview in *Abbas Güçlü ile Genç Bakış (Youth's View with Abbas Güçlü)* to an anti-gender leader is worth mentioning. Erdoğan′s meeting with students in *Abbas Güçlü ile Genç Bakış* in 2002 had a remarkable question; one of the people in the group said, ″As you know there are gay citizens in this country" (tvem, 2015) and everyone started to laugh before he even asked the question. He then asked whether Erdoğan will provide constitutional rights to gay people regarding marriage, Erdoğan replied, their rights should be guaranteed within the constitution (1:19). Contrary to Erdoğan's statements in 2002, his party adopted policies starkly opposing these early views; anti-gender measures have escalated to the extent of restricting Netflix shows simply for featuring a gay character, with same-sex marriage remaining entirely prohibited (Savage, 2020). Besides Erdoğan and the government′s actions against LGBTQ+ people, the Minister of the Interior of Turkey, Süleyman Soylu, has proven himself to be even more discriminatory than Erdoğan regarding LGBTQ+ individuals.

Erdoğan's early positive comments towards LGBTQ+ people and the shift from a liberal leader to a conservative one could also be observed in his party's actions. Having been elected in 2002, AKP began to consummate the Copenhagen criteria to acquire membership in the EU, and it was within this environment that the LGBTQ+ pride march increased its impact remarkably, leading to the first pride in 2003 (Savcı, 2021). Here, it is necessary to clarify that LGBTQ+ presence in Turkey did

not start in 2003; queer people had begun creating formal and informal relationships within themselves and with the feminist movement. It is more appropriate to mark, however, the 2000s as becoming loud[6] of the sexual "others" by clearly demanding equality against the heteropatriarchy[7]. Despite the fact that same-sex intercourse was not banned or criminalized by the AKP government, the state started to define the role of women and queer individuals in public and private spheres in a gendered way. The AKP government, despite Erdoğan's equality promise to homosexuals in 2002, did not attempt to make queer people visible, rendering same-sex acts an undetectable but connived urban culture (Özbay, 2017, p. 11).

The AKP government did not exclude, criminalize, or ostracize LGBTQ+ individuals by the constitution, however, nor did it construct and ameliorate queer identity or community. With the inactivity of the state, so-called gay life skyrocketed in the 2000s, and countless gay clubs and bars commenced amongst the streets of Istanbul (Özbay, 2017, p. 14). This vivid gay life, however, did not mean everything was smooth within LGBTQ+ community in Turkey. Besides the heteropatriarchy imposed by the state through limiting public visibility of queers, there has been an evident concept of hegemonic masculinity amongst LGBTQ+ individuals, which still holds significant influence and is reinforced within the gay community itself. This can be observed in the community of homosexual queers who criticize those exhibiting effeminate traits or behaviors and reject any behavior that is perceived as feminine. While these men have a strong sense of their own masculinity, they also carve out a space that differs from the prevailing norms by valuing a more refined form of masculinity that allows for some feminine qualities, but not to the extent that others would infer their sexual orientation (Bereket & Adam, 2016). This example is related to Turkish queer context since it can be interpreted in a way that homosexual individuals using masculinity as a mask not to appear obviously gay, which could help other people detect whether they are gay or not effortlessly.

[6] Here, loud means becoming more visible and getting their voices heard, it is a term used for LGBTQ+ movement, especially together with "proud," loud & proud.
[7] Heteropatriarchy refers to a political system where heterosexuality and male dominance is enforced as the societal standard or default.

The intersection of misogyny, transphobia, and the policing of gender norms not only emphasizes the societal structures marginalizing queer individuals but also underscores the broader mechanisms through which heteronormative and patriarchal discourses are weaponized in political rhetoric to create a polarized environment, as well. For instance, Soylu's approach involves bringing LGBTQ+ identities to the context of PKK[8] and FETÖ[9] so that his audience will have a more constructed sense of LGBTQ+′s relation to terrorism, securitizing and rendering LGBTQ+ as a national security threat to the country. On the other hand, Erdoğan′s approach against gay marriage is more related to family structure (*aile yapısı)*, in a broader sense, his stigmatization includes strong family connoting a strong nation, which stigmatizes queer people as incapable of creating a family. Erdoğan is provoking his audience to see non-heterosexual families as not ″strong," which connotes a weak nation. It could be argued that both Erdoğan and Soylu′s approaches, by using a heteronormative discourse, marginalize the LGBTQ+ community since one portrays and stigmatizes queer relationships as weak and against family structure, and the other securitizes the LGBTQ+ community by portraying them as terrorists and external threats.

3.1.5. Reproductive Rights under AKP Rule: The Authoritarian Turn

While queer identities have been subject to intense stigmatization and securitization within political discourse, similar mechanisms of control and marginalization could also be observed in the regulation of women′s bodies, specifically in the contentious debates surrounding abortion rights. AKP′s anti-gender discourse has gradually reframed women′s procreative roles more in line with a nationalist and religious agenda, thereby restricting the right to abortion and weakening bodily autonomy without legally banning it. As Ünal and Cindoglu (2013) argue, the AKP government, particularly Erdoğan, has stressed the idea of reproductive citizenship, where a woman′s worth is linked to her ability and willingness to reproduce.

[8] The PKK stands for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê in Kurdish). It is a Kurdish militant and political organization that was founded in 1978 in Turkey.
[9] FETÖ stands for the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (*Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü* in Turkish). This is the term used by the Turkish government to describe the movement led by Fethullah Gülen.

Furthermore, motherhood is labeled as a duty rather than a choice, with Erdoğan calling abortion “murder".

This rhetoric builds a moral order which places reproductive agency against religion and national survival, granting the government the moral legitimacy to regulate women's bodily autonomy. Even though abortion is technically legal up to 10 weeks under the law, the AKP government has created a political climate in which legal access is obstructed in practice. Both public and private hospitals have reportedly reduced or totally removed abortion services, most of the time without announcing formal policy changes (Çelebi & Çabak, 2019). This de facto ban of access through political pressure is an example of the broader trend of ″authoritarian populism,” where the state controls social and moral norms by mobilizing patriarchal values to polarize society and denounce dissenting practices.

This hostile climate is explained in Esengen′s (2023) study of urban-educated cisgender women aged 24–30, who represent the violation of women’s bodily autonomy: abortion is legal, yet inaccessible in practice. This study demonstrates that most women never thought about resorting to a public hospital or clinic because of anticipated refusal, institutional misogyny, or anxiety of breaches in terms of confidentiality. As a result of the de facto ban on abortion by the AKP government, victims relied on abortion solidarity networks composed of trusted female friends or supportive family members in order to find a willing provider. Others had to resort to semi-legal or illegal options, a gray zone of care to abstain from family discovery or social shame. Under the AKP governance, pregnant women even faced the fact that the state′s social security system had sent a congratulatory pregnancy notice to her family without her permission (Esengen, 2023).

These accounts emphasize that the intersection of legal loopholes, institutional obstruction, and social stigma produces an environment of reproductive hazard. These structural barriers reveal how the AKP′s anti-abortion posture not only controls women′s bodies but also entrenches gender-based polarization by aligning reproductive choices with moral deviance through forcing women to face their families or husbands while making a decision about their own body. The result in a

climate requiring women to collaborate with underground networks to reclaim agency in a state that increasingly denies them visibility and rights. These de facto bans are a great sign for future threats for women, since before pride was banned in Turkey, it faced significant restrictions by the government, similar to the abortion issue.

In the 2020s, the AKP further entrenched its anti-gender stance by rejecting the Istanbul Convention, framing it as incompatible with “Turkish family values” and foreign impositions. Alongside its longstanding restrictions on abortion access, the government increasingly targeted LGBTQ+ visibility. Pride marches, once permitted, were systematically banned and securitized, with police repression normalizing the portrayal of queer presence as a threat to public order. These dynamics escalated in the run-up to the 2023 elections, where gender and sexuality became central to the campaign narrative. As recent research shows, the AKP’s election propaganda operationalized political homophobia through three modalities: casting LGBTQ+ identities as cultural and religious threats within an anti-gender framework; vilifying opposition parties as “inner enemies” aligned with these threats; and institutionalizing this discourse through policy initiatives and legal restrictions (Ünal, 2023). In this way, homophobic propaganda functioned not only as a populist tool of othering but also as a mechanism of crisis politics that reinforced polarization and democratic erosion.

3.1.6. Conclusion of Turkish Anti-Gender History

To summarize, this chapter has investigated the intersection of queer and feminist identities in Turkey, with an extensive focus on both historical and contemporary dynamics of heteropatriarchal governments in Turkey and their impact on ostracized groups, including women, queer individuals, and ethnic minorities. Starting with an observation of the historical period from the foundation of the Republic in 1923 to the 1960s, it has shown how modernization projects disciplined women′s roles, attempted to exclude minorities, and entrenched heteronormative and nationalist ideologies. Through situating queer and feminist identities in this historical framework, the chapter sheds light on the way governments juxtaposed compulsory heterosexuality against "the other”, women, ethnic minorities, and non-heterosexual

individuals, creating a hierarchical order which makes these groups subordinate. The appearance of queer presence in Turkey and the impact of the rise to power of AKP were traced to decipher how moderate Islam and heteropatriarchal accounts formed the construction of queer identities. Lastly, this chapter demonstrated how AKP's anti-abortion stance creates widespread inaccessibility to abortion, endangering reproductive autonomy and pushing women to rely on informal networks to navigate legal, institutional, and social barriers. In doing so, the chapter underscores the interconnectedness of feminist and queer studies and highlights the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and power within the Turkish context.

3.2. Hungary: Evolution of Anti-Gender Politics

The historical context of gender and sexuality in Hungary deciphers a complex trajectory formed by diverse political regimes and social norms. Ranging from the state-socialist era's unexpected positive changes towards LGBTQ+ people to the post-1989 transition and the rise of far-right nationalism under Fidesz, women and sexual minorities have usually been regarded as places of social strain and political contestation. This chapter traces the legal, social, and cultural developments affecting queer people and women in Hungary, emphasizing on how these histories are vital as the foundation for the recent polarization which indicates Hungary's political environment today. This chapter also helps tracing how political climate around women and LGBTQ+ people is constructed, maintained, and mobilized through, law, history and politics. Understanding this background is quite important to analyze how women and queer people remain greatly politicized and central to continuing conflicts over national identity, democracy, and society.

3.2.1. Golden Dreams and Gendered Realities: Budapest's Cosmopolitan Rise (1900-1956)

At the turn of the twentieth century, Budapest stood at the intersection of tradition and modernity, undergoing a dramatic transformation into a cosmopolitan metropolis. Budapest was slowly transforming into a cosmopolitan metropolis known for its increasing number of working-class and both culturally and economically strong middle-class devoted to ameliorating the country's liberal politics (Bart, 2007). This transformation was regarded as Budapest's Golden Age,

since the city was starting to become famous for its vivid sexual culture and plenitude of "ladies of the night" [10](sex workers), (Prokopovych, 2017). This Golden Age, besides the vivid culture, could also be marked as the period when women were able to receive partial suffrage in 1918. However, while women in Budapest were joining organizations for gender equality, women's clubs, as much as they advocated for gender equality, Hungarian women also kept stressing the importance of family and maternity, thus, different from the Turkish case. Thus, Hungarian women regarded themselves not as independent individuals, rather as extensions of family, as sisters or mothers (Tóth, 2009).

As Budapest was handling the tensions between religious conservatism and modern liberal values, broader questions of gender and sexuality began to surface, issues that would become even more pronounced in the shifting political landscape of the twentieth century. Later in this era, in which discussions surrounding gay, trans, bisexual, lesbian, and queer issues (particularly within Central Europe) have attained regular prominence in media narratives and public discourse, the relative silence surrounding queerness prior to 1989 emerges as a profoundly compelling subject of inquiry. During the period before 1989, state socialism redefined gender roles through the practice of equality and productivity; women were drawn as workers, mothers, and were given access to education, employment, and childcare. However, behind this facade of emancipation, the regime kept the heteronormative way of family and sexuality. Sexuality was not given any platform and pushed to the private sphere, while non-normative gender identities were silenced, medicalized, or disapproved. Thus, the year 1989 is fundamental to understand homosexuality and queerness in Central Europe because of its interconnection with the fall of communist regimes throughout the region and the upcoming cultural, social, and political transformations (Kurimay & Takács, 2017).

3.2.2. History of Important Men, Lack of Representation of Women

Before the pivotal year of 1989, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 could be seen as one of the most crucial turning points within the path of reformist socialism in

[10] This term refers to sex workers in Budapest.

Hungary. It resisted the existing Stalinist regime and had hopes for a more liberal and national form of socialism. Even though crushed by Soviet intervention at the end, the revolution had a lasting influence on Hungarian political culture. However, in spite of its significance, the mainstream historical story surrounding the 1956 has been dominantly gendered and not inclusive. As Andrea Pető marks, conventional historicizing has mostly regarded 1956 as a history of "important men," (Petö, 2017) emphasizing on male political leaders, intellectuals, and working class whilst reducing women to non-revolutionary roles, usually portrayed solely as the daughters, wives or women helping these male protagonists.

This anti-feminist erasure is not a coincidence yet rather revealing two deeply inserted liabilities within Hungarian historical understanding. First, there has been an enduring unpleasantness among historians and Hungarians in regarding women as active participants, specifically as protestors or armed combatants. Such accounts would have fundamentally challenged the postwar gender norms that confined women to the private sphere and upheld their roles as passive, nurturing figures. Recognizing women as agents of political violence or resistance would have destabilized the hegemonic ideals of femininity under both state socialism and later political regimes (Auer, 2004). Second, as Tóth (2009) mentions, the revolution of 1956 has been historically co-opted by multiple ideological groups within Hungary's modern political landscape: while far-right female politicians usually regard 1956 as the beginning of their anti-communist views, representing themselves as successors to a legacy of Hungarian resistance. Progressive female politicians see the 1956 as a symbol of oppression and the failure of communism.

One of the most shocking erasures in mainstream histories has been the role of Hungarian women who were involved in a silent type of protesting during and after the revolution, particularly in Budapest. Those acts of protests; sitting silently on the streets, lighting candles, and wearing black were powerful political motions which disobeyed Soviet control and state censorship. As Hannah Arendt (1958) suggests, such public acts of appearances as silent protesting, sit-ins helped women to build political presence. Moreover, Hungarian women's protests in 1956 point out not merely a fracture in the political landscape of Eastern Europe, but also, potentially,

“the beginning of a new era of women’s participation in politics” (5). These Hungarian women, by transforming silent mourning into a political power, reshaped the general understanding of protest and proved that how political subjectivity could emerge from the margins of power. Their protesting was not an indication of weakness, rather a purposeful and brave act which overturned both authoritarianism and patriarchal historical narratives, albeit being omitted.

3.2.3. The Queer Impact of 1956 Revolution

The social and political consolidation after the Hungarian Revolution, loosening the grip of the state over the Hungarian people, led to differences in the way homosexual relationships were treated by courts (Kurimay, 2021). Even though queer people kept being charged for homosexual relationships, there had been a drastic change in the way the Appeals Court responded to their appeals. On the condition that sexual acts were between two adult men, the penalty for homosexual act no longer required incarceration yet a fine according to the Appeals Court’s decisions after the Hungarian Revolution. Kurimay (2021) argues that this shift in penalty can be interpreted as the change of socialist perspective on homosexuality; rather than seeing it as a threat to society, it was seen just as akaratgy-enge (weak-willed) actions of men, as long as they are not against socialism (219). Thereby, homosexuality became to be tolerated unless it was being promoted in the public sphere. In terms of legality, this resolution could be regarded as aligning with the socialist state’s sense of monitoring morality in a way that preserves ideological control yet abstains from observable repression if public or political limits were not tested.

One of the most important legal turning points in Hungary’s LGBTQ+ history took place in 1961, it is marked by the socialist state deciding to decriminalize homosexual relations between consenting adults. This change was not solely unexpected in the region, yet symbolized an essential step towards adjusting the legal discourse on same-sex relationships from criminality to conditional tolerance, as well. However, the same-sex relationships in Hungary were going to be held to a unique standard. This standard was regarding the age of consent, while the age of consent for heterosexual relationships was 14, the age of consent for homosexual

relationships was set to 20, which was considerably higher than heterosexual relationships (Kurimay & Takács, 2017, p. 589). Thus, one could argue that although the Hungarian government decriminalized homosexuality, they were still biased towards homosexual relationships since they held heterosexual and homosexual couples to a different standard, which could indicate the common argument against homosexuality that they might be "confused", and they will figure out their sexuality when they become an adult.

In addition to the biases against homosexuality which reflects itself in the Penal Code, the different requirements for heterosexual and homosexual relationships brought opportunities for blackmailers (Kurimay & Takács, 2017, p. 589). During 1960s, the public opinion on homosexuality was also held to a different standard, similar to Penal Code. Public opinion towards homosexual people was not even moderate, for the Hungarian people, sexually desiring the same gender was thought to be "not normal" according to the public opinion surveys (Zombori qtd. in Kurimay & Takács, 2016). However, the views towards homosexuals were gendered; while lesbians were being seen as women, the case for gays was different; they were called *buzi*, which is similar to the derogatory f-word in English.

Yet, though lesbians were shown more tolerance, in general, both lesbians and gays were regarded as problematic (Borgos, 2015). In the 1970s, queer people in Hungary faced another problem, *lakaskerdes*, the apartment question; being under a state-socialist government, Hungarian people could not easily have access to private space. Due to the acute housing issue, the available houses could only be rented or bought by those legally married (Nagy, 2014). Thereby, having these circumstances, homosexual couples could not have access to private property and for them, not being able to legally marry their partners meant not only lack of social and economic guarantee, yet also an access to private life as a couple. This apartment issue, later on in 1980s, became a national phenomenon which impacted married heterosexual couple, as well.

The changing societal dynamics of state-socialist Hungary before 1989 brought a dichotomous environment for the LGBTQ people. On the one hand, infrastructural

issues, for instance the limited available number of houses and the paternalistic state's incapability to fulfill the demands of its citizens, put homosexuals in a tremendously disadvantaged position. Securing apartments was not easy even for heterosexual and married couples, putting single individuals, especially the ones without a kid, at the end of waiting lists. This insufficient access to housing led to a situation that limits living freely or independently (Borgos, 2015). On the other hand, social alterations, for example, the rising number of divorced couples and younger individuals' hesitation to marry, granted homosexuals freedom comparatively from the cultural and economic expectations related to traditional gender roles. This new environment created space for some to discover their sexual identities, build relationships, nevertheless, most of the queer people in Hungary maintained conforming to heteronormative standards by performing heterosexual marriages because of the cultural pressure or internalized hatred (Renkin, 2009). In spite of these changes, the societal understanding of same-sex relationships in Hungary stayed profoundly stigmatized.

Studies conducted in that time period, specifically the 1978 sociological survey conducted by Heleszta and Rudas (1978), reflected the long-established homophobia within Hungarian people, especially the working class while concurrently demonstrating the pervasiveness of same-sex relationships as one of the "common" sexual scripts amongst the Hungarian society. According to their research, respondents had to order four different characters from favorable to unfavorable, one of them being a homosexual, the most favoring group towards homosexuality was females with university education, while the least favoring was working-class male, with working-class females very close second (1978). These different attitudes emphasized the tension between the growing visibility of queerness and the tenacious societal and institutional obstacles to approval. State-backed narratives mostly connect homosexuality to immorality and social deviance by looking at police reports from the 70s and 80s, highlighting problems regarding the so-called "spread" of homosexuality, specifically within Hungarian youth (Kurimay & Takács, 2017). Similar rhetoric portrays queers as not merely victims of a health issue yet also representatives of social disruption, strengthening their stigmatization.

3.2.4. Emergency and Vulnerability: 1970s 'HIV and AIDS Epidemic

During the 70s, however, Hungary showed signs of change. Hungarian state authorities and the police commenced to notice what they reported as an increase in same-sex acts and the beginning of a novel generation of queer individuals who were not willing to keep their lives closeted. Particularly, this group of lesbians and gays sought to be recognized and accepted via advocating for visibility and equality in public forums (James, 2007). Even though the state maintained prohibiting the initiation of queer NGOs, covert subcultures were being formed in city centers, specifically in Budapest. Those networks, whilst being in peril to scrutiny and blackmail, provided emotional and material aid to their comrades, promoting a sense of belonging amidst prevailing stigmas.

The public's view on same-sex relationships started to shift during this period, as well. Mainstream works such as the film *Egymásra Nézve* (*Another Way*), depicting a lesbian relationship, and the popular book *Furcsa Párok* (*Strange Couples*), telling the struggles of homosexuals, pushed queerness into mainstream discussion. Global impact, mainly from Western Europe, contributed to the increasing visibility of the Hungarian queer community even more. Foundations such as the Homosexuelle Initiative (HOSI) make the connections between East and West smoother, leading to such events as the 1987 conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) to be held in Budapest (McLellan, 2012).

Incongruously, it was the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in 1985 which turned out to be a crucial moment for queer community being formed in Hungary. Being informed by the potential risks of a public health culmination, state authorities put measures in place to tackle populations that are at risk, inclusive of homosexuals. Even though the quantity of HIV/AIDS cases remained low in comparison to Western Europe, the epidemic necessitated engaging with the LGBTQ+ community, although mostly through the view of public health since social justice for LGBTQ+ community was not a concern. This term spots a conflicting turning point; although state socialism kept suppressing queer advocacy and preserve institutionalized homophobia, the amalgamation of social change, public view, and the tension of a global health crisis resulted in forging small spaces for LGBTQ+ representation and

support groups within Hungary′s queer population. The emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic also led to “layering” (Mill et al., 2010, p. 1471) of stigmatization, and this layering occurs through social exclusion due to queer behavior and lifestyles, as well as the anxiety of contracting HIV.

Despite increasing stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people as a result of HIV/AIDS, the party leader’s attitude towards queer organizations took a positive direction. From their pragmatic point of view, they should support queer organizations so that they could be responsible for sexual education and awareness of the homosexual community. Additionally, having queer people act in organizations made it easier for the government to monitor the LGBTQ+ community. From the perspective of queer activists, whilst the anxiety of HIV/AIDS was a sound concern, this concern was regarded as a benefit, mainly since it allowed them to form queer organizations legally. Although HIV/AIDS was majorly affecting homosexual men, lesbians were also playing a role in these queer organizations (Mill et al., 2010).

3.2.5. Emergence of Young Orbán & EU Integration

After the peaceful transition to democracy, in 1990, a group of young activists was invited to perform at a Budapest concert named *Rendszerzáró Házibuli* ("House Party of Regime Change”). Among them was a 26-year-old law student, Viktor Orbán (Schwartzburg & Szijarto, 2019). This moment of youthful defiance and celebration marked the beginning of Orbán′s political ascent. Over the next few years, he became a key political figure who directed Hungary’s change to democracy. By 1998, his party, Fidesz, had accumulated sufficient power to form a coalition with the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Independent Smallholder Party (FKGP). This alliance received 42% of the vote in the national elections, paving the way for Orbán to become prime minister. During his tenure until 2002, Hungarians witnessed such controversial decisions as reducing parliamentary sessions and demanding lesser legislative supervision (Ádám, 2019). In 2002, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) won the elections and agreed on a coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats.

In 2003, Hungarians said “yes” to the European Union, and in 2004, Hungary officially entered the EU. Shortly after Orbán, Hungary, until it became a part of the EU, was no longer even a ‘transition’ state: the transition had been completed and Hungary was a ‘normal country’ (Magyar, 2016). However, this democratization period only lasted until 2010. With Orbán's rise to power through the Fidesz-KDNP coalition, Hungary experienced a significant shift in governance, which was particularly evident in the government's adoption of anti-gender coping strategies following the transition from the liberal MSZP government. Since then, significant legal and policy changes have affected both women's and queer rights in Hungary. For instance, the Family Protection Act of 2012 advocates for familialism, strengthening pre-determined gender roles through the family. Furthermore, since the Family Protection Act defends the traditional family, it also purposefully disregards the possibility of parenthood for queer couples (Grzebalska & Pető, 2017). The way this act favors reproduction can also be observed through its measures, as CEDAW, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, argues, the act allows tax exemptions for mothers with four or more children, and loans for women under the age of 40 for their first marriage (CEDAW, 2023).

Connecting this to the roots of feminism in Hungary at the beginning of the chapter, the view of women as child bearers maintained for over a hundred years (Petö, 2002). However, this emphasis on reproducing more by Fidesz has broader political undertones; it does not attempt to glorify womanhood, rather, it attempts to eliminate the need for immigration to meet the need for workforce in Hungary. By incentivizing women to become mothers, Fidesz government is not only pushing traditional family agenda, but also creating a system which costs women their professional careers. Additionally, Fidesz government’s dissatisfaction with women’s situation in the society goes beyond the professional career, according to one of their reports, “An increase in female graduates could make women less likely to marry and have children.” (Greilinger, 2022), which demonstrates that Fidesz government are upset with the fact that women are getting university education, besides not having more children. It can be argued that Fidesz’s policies are indeed not intended to empower women, but rather to shape their roles in both public and private spheres to contribute to deeper political and demographic goals. By

discouraging higher education and pushing women toward motherhood under the guise of traditional values, the government aims at reducing the dependency on immigration whilst strengthening patriarchal ideals which constrain women's independence and professional advancement (Jenkner, 2017).

3.2.6. Gender Ideology Discourse and Recent Developments

Having defined gender roles, the government commenced to restrict LGBTQ+ rights in 2012. The Fidesz government has defined marriage as a union merely between a man and a woman, thus restricting same-sex marriage. This further demonstrates how Orbán and his party construct ″the people" in a ″nativist" way by consistently leaving out non-traditional gender identities and sexual preferences (Sayan-Cengiz & Akyüz, 2021). After this prohibition, *Heti Válasz*, the biggest Hungarian right-wing magazine, which is backed by Orbán, stressed on the upcoming threat of ″A tolerancia diktatúrája" (the dictatorship of tolerance), arguing that queer people were soon to endanger the rights of the majority (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, p. 120). While queer people were being painted as dangerous to society, Orbán's restrictions on LGBTQ+ citizens went beyond legal matters. In 2020, Hungary also formally rejected the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The government justified this decision by framing the treaty as a Trojan horse for ″gender ideology," claiming that it undermined Hungary's sovereignty by forcing the country to accept progressive views on gender identity and to open its doors to migrants under the pretext of protecting women. In parliamentary debates, Fidesz politicians argued that the Convention blurred the ″natural" distinctions between men and women and attempted to impose foreign values incompatible with Hungarian traditions.

By rejecting the Istanbul Convention, Orbán not only signaled resistance to international human rights frameworks but also reinforced a broader narrative that equated gender equality initiatives with external threats to the nation's cultural and political integrity (European Parliament, 2020). In 2021, the Hungarian government authorized that LGBTQ+ people could no longer appear or perform in schools or TV series and movies whose audience is children (Gera, 2023). Hungary's biggest anti-

gender campaign was the 2022 referendum, where they asked four questions: the education of sexual orientation in schools without parental consent; the promotion of sex reassignment surgery for children; introducing children to adult media content; and allowing for media content on gender-reassignment procedures to children (Ritimo, 2022). However, the referendum eventually was not valid because the majority of voters did not cast valid ballots, and this was primarily thanks to the boycott announced by NGOs in Hungary.

3.2.7. Conclusion of Hungarian Anti-Gender History

The historical path of feminist and queer movements in Hungary, from Budapest′s Golden Age to the post-communist era, demonstrates a continuous tension between modernization and deeply ingrained traditional values. While women′s movements and LGBTQ+ activism have slowly sculpted spaces for representation and rights, these developments have intermittently faced opposition from conservative groups ranging from religious institutions to the aristocracy and populist political leaders like Viktor Orbán. The change from state socialism to democracy, at first opened new avenues for gender and queer rights, however, the ascending of Fidesz demonstrates the way polarization boosts anti-gender discourse, boosting traditional gender roles under the guise of national and familial values. This historical transformation stresses how anti-gender campaigns are not remote occurrences, yet part of a well-established struggle where gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights are titled as existential threats to the nation and family. Thus, Hungary becomes a critical case within the broader scenery of polarization, demonstrating how women and LGBTQ+ remain central arenas in political conflicts until today.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in this study, detailing the research design, case selection, and tools used to examine anti-gender discourse in Hungary and Turkey, which is implemented to strengthen the voter base and further polarize. This study employs a descriptive and small-N comparative case study design (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016, p. 394). I chose Turkey and Hungary as comparative cases because both countries are regularly discussed in the literature in terms of political polarization (Somer, 2018; Rashed et al., 2020; Enyedi, 2016; Vegetti, 2019), especially regarding democratic backsliding and populist polarization. However, while national-level studies examine each case individually, there is a notable shortage of systematic comparative research linking them together by combining anti-gender aspects of polarization (Kancı, 2023; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018). Thus, I attempted to examine and compare these two cases by relying on gender and queer aspects by seeking to unravel the paradox between political leaders′ invocation of national unity, morality, and tradition, and the simultaneous exclusion and targeting of marginalized identities.

This contradiction is particularly evident in the discursive practices of Fidesz and the AKP, where language becomes a tool for constructing certain gendered and sexual identities as deviant, dangerous, or foreign. In terms of the units of analysis, I chose Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán. The reason behind the selection of Soylu is that, as the former Minister of Interior, Soylu consistently delivered aggressive speeches which integrated the AKP′s ideological stance with mostly security-related narratives, rendering his rhetoric essential to capture the AKP′s broader discursive strategy. His counterpart, Sándor Pintér, is not involved in giving anti-gender speeches during the

election campaign; there were 0 speeches given, according to my research, and this will be explained in the following subsection.

The study relies on Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) and contemporary approaches in the literature (for details see chapter 5), to systematically investigate how political speeches and public statements function to reproduce negative representations of LGBTQ+ people and women. Through discursive techniques such as labeling, hypothetical moral threats, and symbolic boundary-making, political actors contribute to a narrative in which traditional gender roles are idealized. At the same time, queer identities and feminist politics are framed as existential threats to the moral and social fabric of the nation. This discourse not only legitimizes state intervention and legal restrictions but also shapes how individuals are understood, while simultaneously excluding or marginalizing others in line with Foucauldian theories of discourse, power, and panopticism[11].

4.1. Data Gathering

The data gathering process focused on the pre-election periods, during which political discourse tends to intensify and consolidate key ideological messages. For both countries, I focus on the campaign period, a month before the last general election. The analysis of Hungary covers the period between 3 March 2022 and 3 April 2022, leading up to the 2022 national elections. For the Turkish case, the data collection period extends from 14 April 2023 to 28 May 2023. This extended period is due to Presidential system in Turkey which uses two round majoritarian system. In 2023, the first round of parliamentary presidential elections took place on the 14th of May, while the second round of presidential elections was on the 28th of May. Political speeches delivered by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Süleyman Soylu, and Viktor Orbán were collected from public archives, news platforms, and official party channels. While Erdoğan's speeches are obtained via TCCB

[11] Panopticism, a concept developed by Michel Foucault in "Discipline and Punish" (1977), refers to a mode of power that functions through internalized surveillance. Rather than relying solely on visible coercion, panoptic power leads individuals to self-regulate due to fear of being watched or judged. In the context of this thesis, it helps to understand how gendered subjects—especially women seeking abortions or LGBTQ+ individuals—are disciplined through social and institutional scrutiny, even in the absence of direct legal prohibition, they are rejected service.

(https://www.tccb.gov.tr/), Soylu′s are obtained via his own website (https://suleymansoylu.com/konusmalar/) in Turkish and Orbán's speeches are acquired via Hungary Today (https://hungarytoday.hu/) which publishes Orbán's speeches in English.

Additionally, Soylu's counterpart, Sándor Pintér, had 0 speeches during the election campaign; that's why there won't be any analysis for him. Since Pintér did not deliver any speeches during the one-month election period, Viktor Orbán assumed the role of the primary and almost exclusive voice of the campaign. His individual representation of the party's agenda and anti-gender discourse demonstrates the centralization of authority in his person, making Orbán himself the focal point for the Hungarian side of the analysis. A limitation of this study is that it relies on English translations of Hungarian original speeches rather than the original Hungarian texts. This may affect the analysis in several ways: subtle nuances, rhetorical devices, idiomatic expressions, or culturally specific terms might be lost or altered in translation, potentially influencing the interpretation of stigmatizing, securitizing, or gendered discourse. Erdoğan had a total of 40, Soylu had 39, Orbán had 18, and Hungarian minister Pintér had 0 speeches.

Politician	Total Number of Speeches	# of Speeches with LGBTQ or Women Mentioned
Erdoğan	40	31
Orbán	18	11
Soylu	39	32
Pintér	0	0

Table 1: Politicians' # of Speeches

The speeches were then imported into MAXQDA for systematic coding and categorization. The unit of analysis is the speech where LGBTQ or WOMEN are

mentioned. From these speeches, I first analyzed the whole speech to understand the importance or salience of the LGBTQ+ and women for the speech, then I examined the parts where the leaders use the terms to understand which words the leaders use the most when they talk about LGBTQ+ and women. The speeches were coded into four thematic categories: stigmatization, securitization, gender, and LGBT as subject. The stigmatization category included instances where LGBTQ+ individuals, women, or opposition parties were framed negatively, often with derogatory or discrediting language, such as being morally corrupt (Neelam, 2022). Securitization focused on speeches that portrayed the family, women, or children as something to be protected, or framed LGBTQ+ individuals as dangers to national security or cultural survival (Heikkilä & Kmak, 2023). The gender category included content forcing traditional gender roles, such as references to motherhood, fatherhood, marriage, or heteronormative family structures excluding gay/lesbian parents (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Lastly, the LGBT as subject category was used to capture moments where LGBTQ+ people were mentioned without direct negative framing, but still functioned as symbolic figures within broader ideological narratives. Interestingly, this category was absent in Orbán′s speeches, whereas it appeared more frequently in the discourse of Erdoğan and Soylu.

I conducted the process of coding and thematic categorization manually and iteratively, making sure that there is thorough engagement with the material. Rather than applying pre-existing codebooks, I developed the four main categories independently, drawing on repeated readings of the speeches and informed by both theoretical frameworks and contextual knowledge of Turkish and Hungarian politics. This unique approach created space for better sensitivity to nuances, such as implicit forms of stigmatization or subtle shifts in securitizing language, since securitization is not only about national security, it can also be monitored in securitization of family, children or women. Each speech was read multiple times in order to capture not merely overt statements but underlying rhetorical strategies, as well. The categorization process was time-intensive, involving continual refinement of codes and their definitions as themes emerged from the data. This prolonged immersion strengthened the depth and reliability of the analysis, allowing me to interpret the

discursive construction of gender and sexuality with attention to both explicit meaning and implicit power relations embedded in political speech.

Lastly, this study combines content analysis with discourse analysis. While content analysis helps identify patterns of stigmatization and securitization through systematic coding and frequency analysis, discourse analysis examines how these discursive strategies function as mechanisms of subject constitution: subjugating LGBTQ+ individuals and women as "threatening others" while at the same time constructing "proper" (*makbul*) national subjects.

4.2. The Construction of Graphs

To visualize patterns of stigmatization and securitization in political discourse, I generated two types of graphs via MAXQDA, word trends graphs and code trends graphs, based on speeches of Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán. The word trends graphs were created by extracting the absolute frequency of the most used words within each corpus. These graphs allowed me to trace which thematic clusters which were emphasized more prominently and consistently over time. Additionally, the code trend graphs were constructed through an inductive coding process, where each speech was manually coded concerning whether it shows stigmatization, securitization, LGBTQ+ or gender-related framing. These codes were then used to demonstrate the frequency and fluctuation of discursive strategies across different speakers. While word trends demonstrate the lexical emphasis on certain words, code trends aim to reflect the discursive aims by showing how often actors implement stigmatizing or securitizing discourses. Both of these visualizations are complimentary to the discourse analysis by giving a visual outline of rhetorical tendencies and differences between political figures.

CHAPTER 5

DISCOURSE & CONTENT ANALYSES OF SPEECHES

This chapter presents a systematic analysis of the speeches delivered by Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán, moving from broad content patterns to more profound discursive meaning-making. The first step involves a content analysis using MAXQDA, which allows for a structured and replicable examination of all available speeches. By coding recurring terms, themes, and co-occurrences, this approach ensures that the analysis is not based on selectively chosen quotations but on a comprehensive and systematic overview of the leaders' rhetoric. The goal is to provide the reader with a "big picture" of word usage and thematic patterns, identifying which concepts, such as family, security, or LGBT+ issues, are most prominent and how they cluster together. This quantitative foundation prepares the ground for more nuanced, interpretive analyses that follow.

Building on this, the chapter proceeds to Foucauldian discourse analysis, which explores how the leaders construct meaning, mobilize emotions, and govern populations through language. While content analysis maps patterns and frequency, discourse analysis examines the mechanisms behind them, such as stigmatization, emotional securitization, panopticism, and biopolitics. These tools allow the study to trace how repeated terms and phrases function not just descriptively but actively producing fear, moral outrage, and social surveillance.

5.1 Content Analysis of Leaders 'Speeches

In this subsection, I will present two types of content analysis of the speeches delivered by Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán. First, a word trend analysis is conducted to mark recurring keywords and rhetorical emphases across the leaders' discourse. Tracking word frequencies and shifts over time allows the study to capture how particular terms such as those associated with morality, nationhood, security, or deviance are strategically implemented. Following this, a code trend analysis will be

shown. While word trends highlight the surface-level lexical choices, code trends reflect the underlying thematic structures. Here, speeches are categorized according to broader analytical codes such as *stigmatization*, *securitization*, *LGBT as subject*, and *gender*, revealing the discursive strategies that leaders consistently employ to shape public perception.

Four central analytical tools guide this investigation: stigmatization, securitization, gender, LGBT as subject. Stigmatization refers to the construction of certain identities, such as women and LGBTQ+ individuals, as deviant or immoral. Securitization, according to the Copenhagen School, entails elevating such stigmatized identities into existential threats that demand extraordinary responses. Yet, in the case of Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán, securitization is not articulated in neutral or technocratic language but through an emotional register. Leaders weaponize emotions such as fear, disgust, anger, and pride to represent the gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights as perils to society (Ganz, 2023). Together, these tools provide a lens to examine how right-wing populist leaders weaponize discourse.

5.1.1. Analyses of Word Trends

The word trends in the speeches of Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán demonstrate a shared concept of what Mehran et al. (2024) regard as gendered frames. These affective rhetorical tools construct moral hierarchies and assign blame or protection. In Orbán′s graph, for instance, the sharp peak of the word *″child"* around April 1 is compatible with the Hungarian″ child protection" referendum, where gender ideology is constructed as an existential and ideological threat. As it can be observed in Heikkilä and Kmak′s (2023) concept of vulnerabilization, Orbán's rhetoric highlights the innocence of children and frames them as deserving of special protection, whilst positioning ″gender ideology" as the reason for that special protection. In this securitizing discourse implemented by Orbán, ″child" becomes the vulnerable victim of "gender ideology," while the advocates of gender identity including LGBTQ+ people are left outside the boundaries of national belonging and protection, not only unworthy of rights yet also hazardous to the nation′s future: the children of Hungary. Additionally, as it can be seen in the Figure 2, the moments when the word "child" is used, the words "election" and "referendum" are also

present, and this demonstrates how Orbán attempts to polarize his own voter base under the guise of protecting the children and vilifying "gender ideology" simultaneously in an electoral context.

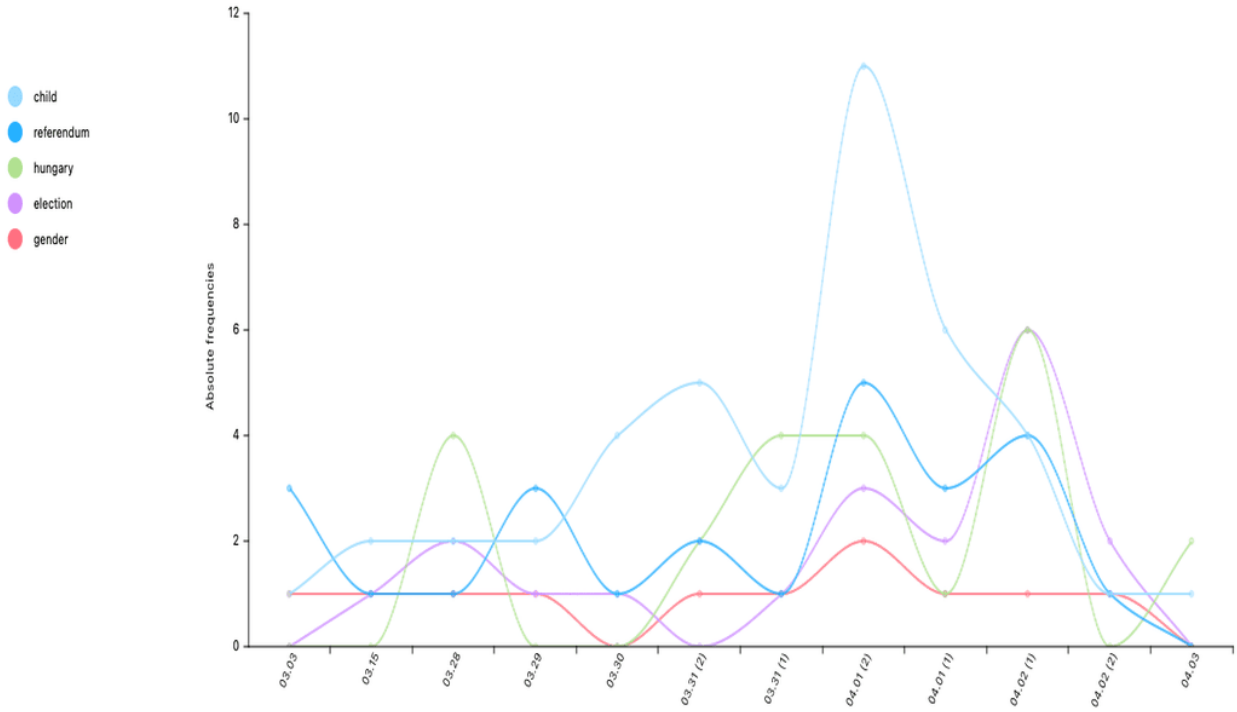

Figure 2: Word Trends of Orbán

In line with Orbán, selective moralization appears in Erdoğan's speeches, as well. In Figure 3, the most frequent used words are *"Kemal," (the opposition party' presidential candidate) "terör," "*LGBT*," "aile"* (family), *"Allah,"* and *"Türkiye"* together, they are sufficient to construct a stigmatizing populist discourse which frames the opposition leader (Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu) as a both political and moral threat that is juxtaposed next to "LGBT" against "*aile*", "*Allah*" and "*Türkiye*". *"*LGBT,*"* in Erdoğan's speeches, is the third most used word (see Figure 3), is placed against *"family"* and *"Allah," "Türkiye"* building a dichotomy between religious and national virtue and corrupt, deviant opposition. This is an excellent reflection of Neelam's (2022) analysis of how Muslim women are given a false account of not being English speakers, thus discursively designed as either victims needing rescue

or potential threats requiring exclusion. Similarly, Erdoğan implements the securitizing discourse where he draws *"aile"* as vulnerable and sacred part of Turkey and its future, thus morally worthy of protection, on the other hand, he renders queer individuals, non-traditional gender roles and political opposition "*Kemal"* as unholy and illegitimate, the "undeserving" of protection, ultimately the internal enemy which is required to securitize family.

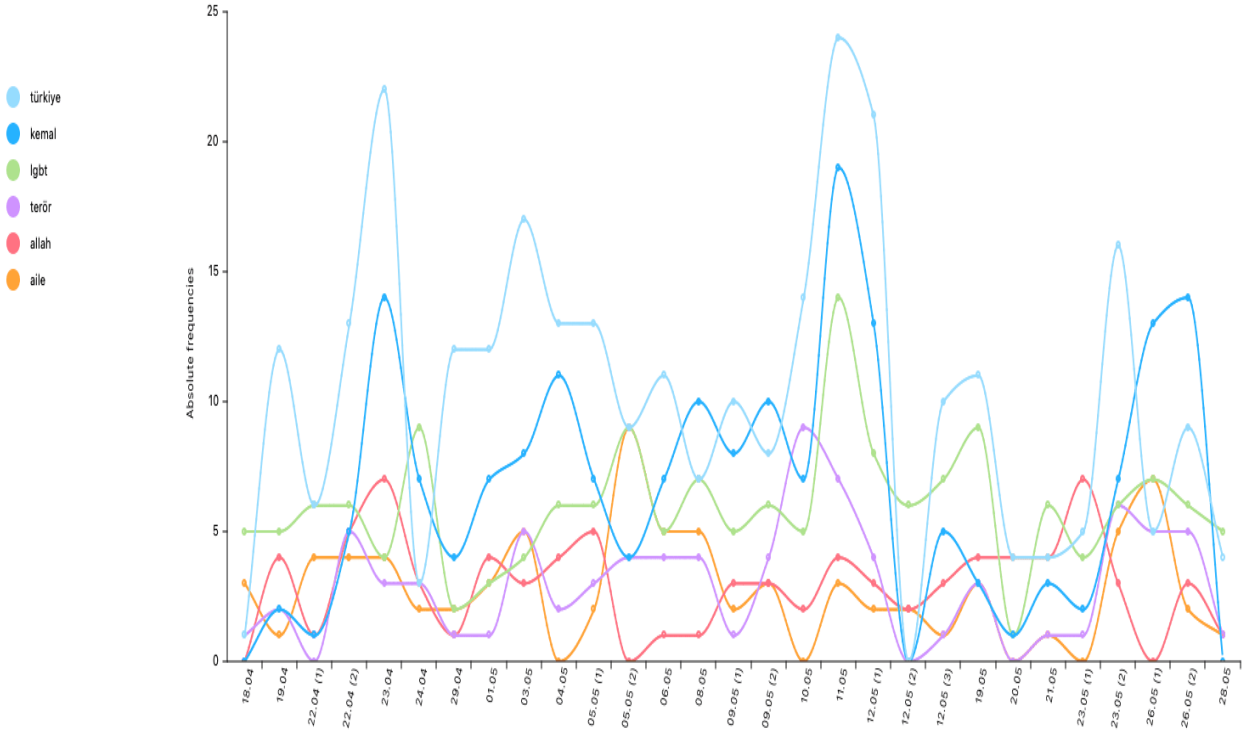

Figure 3: Word Trends of Erdoğan

Soylu's graph expands this dynamic through mostly securitization, even though stigmatization is also present, by observing the most used words; *"terör"* (terrorism), *"PKK"*, *"Amerika"*, "LGBT," and *"Erdoğan"* it can be argued that every single one of them except *"Erdoğan"* reflects a world of discourse where national threats are everywhere both internal, external, and ideological and all of those threats are interconnected in his speeches to further strengthen his securitizing discourse. *"LGBT"* appears here too even though the least used in the five most used graph (see

Figure 4), its purpose in Soylu's speeches is to be in proximity to these securitized terms like *"terör"*, *"PKK"*, *"Amerika"*, demonstrating how Soylu constructs a wider security narrative, where, unlike Erdoğan, he concentrates on the threats, without drawing *"aile"* as the securitizing object. PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) is officially titled as a terrorist organization by Turkey, and frequently invoked in political rhetoric as the archetypal existential threat. By positioning "LGBT" alongside "PKK" and "Amerika," Soylu symbolically elevates queer identities to the same plane of security threat as terrorism and foreign intervention, showing how cultural issues are woven into Turkey's broader anti-terror and anti-Western security discourse.

However, without heavily concentrating on family, Soylu is still able to polarize his own audience against LGBTQ+ people by mainly connecting them to *"terör"*, *"PKK"*, and *"Amerika"*. Going back to Heikkilä and Kmak (2023), this demonstrates how securitizing discourse can strip individuals or groups of legitimacy and render them as unworthy of protection and recognition based merely on potential risk. Soylu's polarizing and dehumanizing discourse connects queerness and gender not only to moral decay, yet also to terrorism via *"terör"* and *"PKK"* and Western infiltration via *"Amerika"* and these framings place LGBTQ+ individuals at the heart of unworthiness of recognition and legitimacy, where only traditional, Muslim, and heteronormative citizens are deemed worthy of recognition and legitimacy.

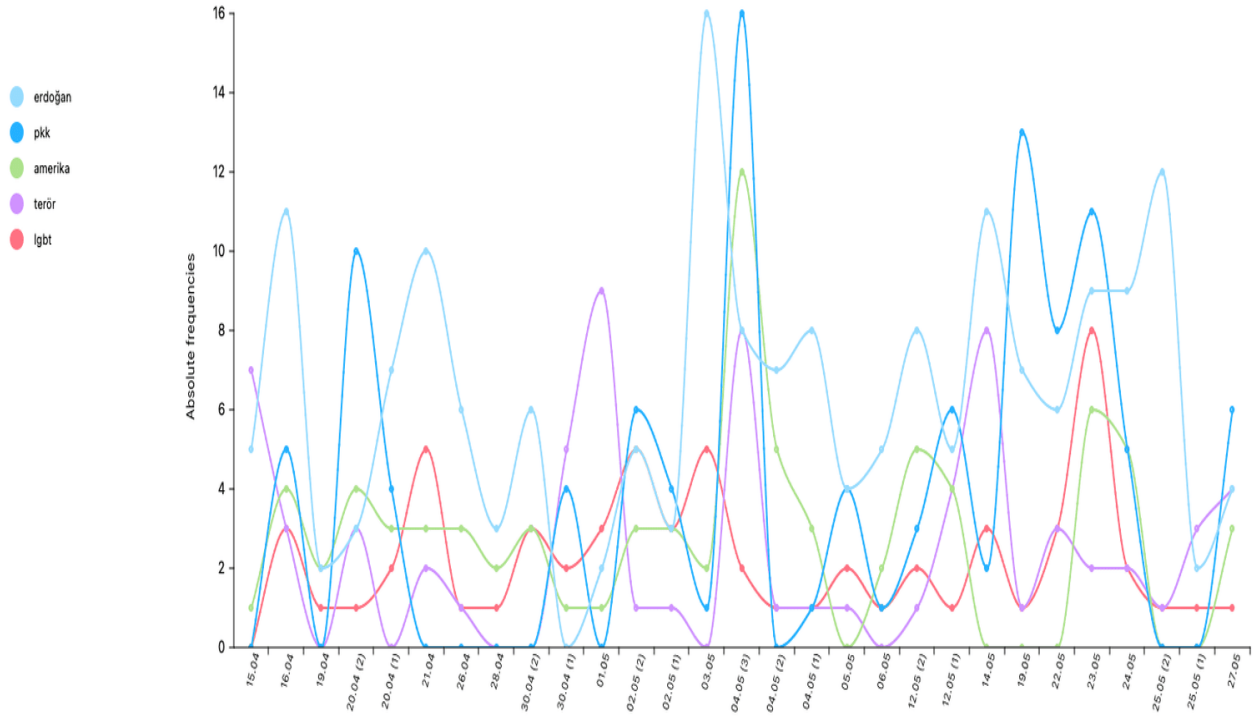

Figure 4: Word Trends of Soylu

5.1.2. Analyses of Code Trends

Throughout the speeches of Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán, securitization and stigmatization work as interconnected discursive strategies, most of the time articulated via gendered themes and affective framings. As it can be seen in the graphs, securitization and stigmatization codes commonly rise together, specifically in Erdoğan and Soylu′s rhetoric, however, different from Erdoğan and Soylu, Orbán preserves a more stable ideological cadence since he concentrates on one or two themes in on the same day. This simultaneous implementation of stigmatization and securitization, mostly by Erdoğan and Soylu, demonstrates what Gaufman has identified as a broader pattern in political communication: the use of gendered vulnerability and masculine fragility to justify the exclusion of political ″others.” In her article, *″Damsels in Distress: Fragile Masculinity in Digital War”* (2023), she identifies the way politicians implement such feminized metaphors as depicting the nation as a vulnerable woman or enemy figures as emasculated (LGBT) to justify securitizing measures.

This framing is particularly evident in Erdoğan′s discourse through the constant mentioning of motherhood, womanhood, and family structure, where sudden spikes in ″gender” (as seen in Figure 5) coincide with periods of heightened threat construction, which is the election period in this case. Different from Soylu and Orbán, as it can be observed in Figure 5, Erdoğan relies on stigmatization more than he relies on securitization, he implements stigmatization with the help of juxtaposing queerness or non-traditional gender norms against Islam, which is a powerful tool to stigmatize and polarize ″them” against ″us” since majority of Turkish people are Muslim and significant portion of his voters are religiously oriented. In addition, different from Soylu, his securitization is also combined with the Gender code, as it can be seen in Graph 1, the Gender code is frequently visible, which illustrates how Erdoğan relies on womanhood, family, and motherhood to further securitize family structure and Turkish youth.

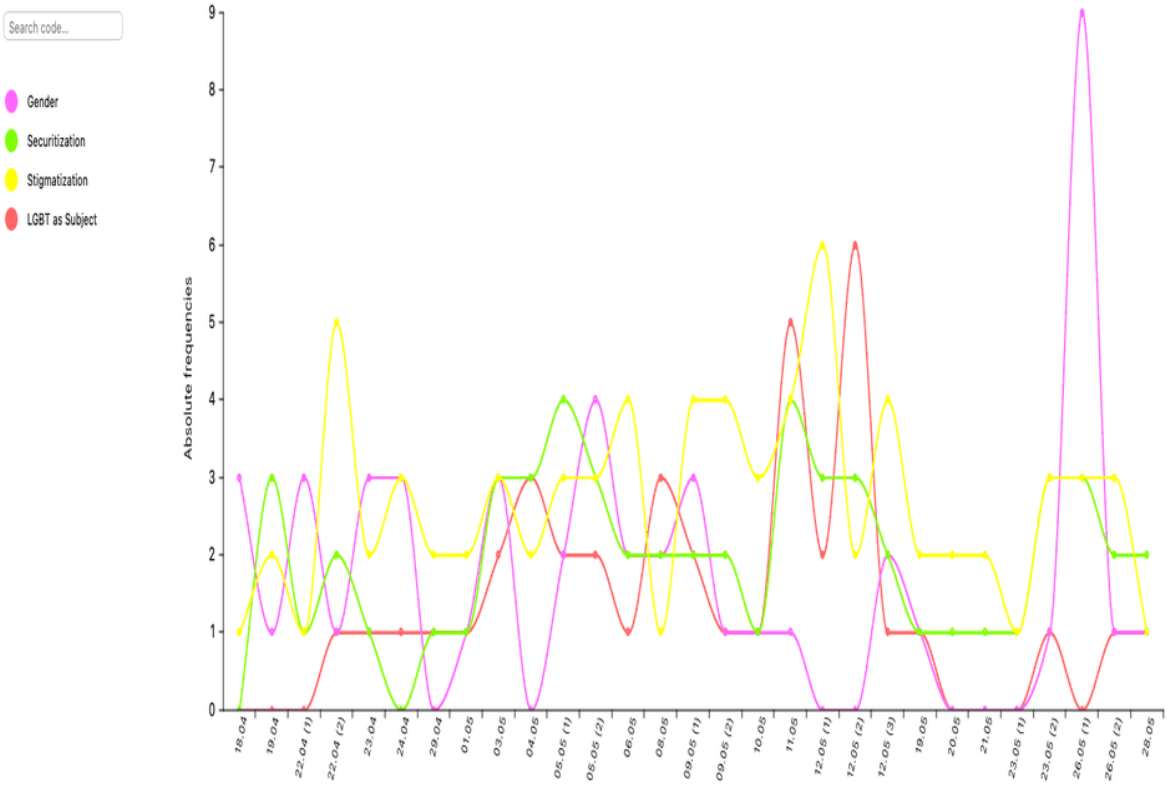

Figure 5: Code Trends of Erdoğan

In Soylu′s speeches, the securitization pattern is more constant and belligerent. He emphasizes on securitization as an action of threat building and management of it (Balzacq et al., 2016), more frequently than both Erdoğan and Orbán, most of the occasions connecting security issues to queer identities by portraying them as internal and external threats. As it can be observed in Figure 6, his discourse relies the most on securitization, surpassing other three tags. This corresponds to Ganz (2023)'s argument that political regimes use emotional appeals like national pride or disgust (sapkın) to construct minority subjects as security threats to the country. Soylu′s rhetoric reflects this discursive strategy, depending on emotional and gendered narratives to mark queer individuals as both immoral and destabilizing, and polarizing his audience against the LGBTQ+ people to solidify his own voters.

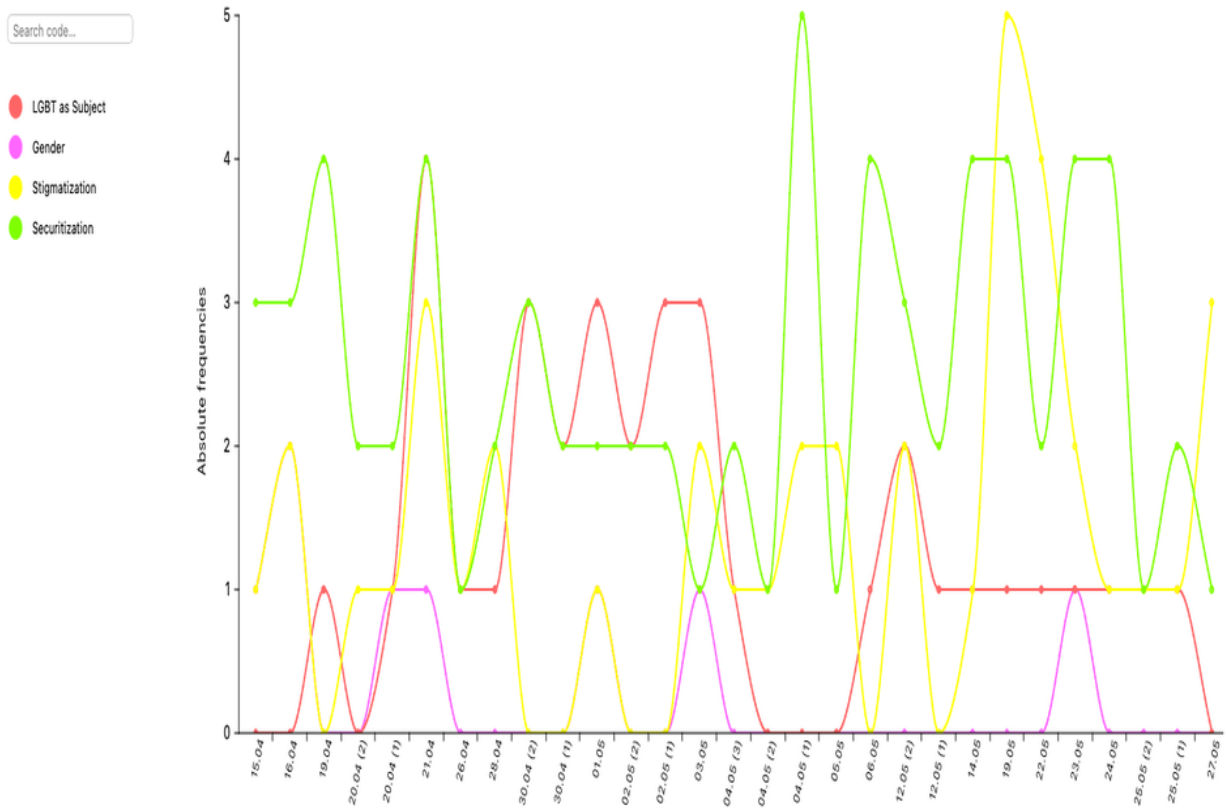

Figure 6: Code Trends of Soylu

In contrast, Orbán never mentions LGBTQ+ people explicitly. This is in line with the findings of Graff and Korolczuk (2022) in *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist*

Moment where they find that populist politicians increasingly mark gender itself as a foreign, ideological threat, imported by liberal elites or institutions. However, even though Orbán does not clearly mention LGBTQ+ people or feminist women, Figure 7 demonstrates a constant rise in securitization without the presence of "LGBT" code, pointing a trend that gives place to more abstract terms like "gender ideology," and "gender madness," which indirectly criticize feminist and queer movements. This is in line with Pető's work (2021), emphasizing Orbán's speeches as securitizing due to redefining national security by embedding "gender ideology," into its child protection and parental discourse. This illustrates how threats can be rhetorically transformed into imagined ideologies threatening a country's security, rather than individuals, allowing Orbán to construct moral panic without directly naming queer citizens.

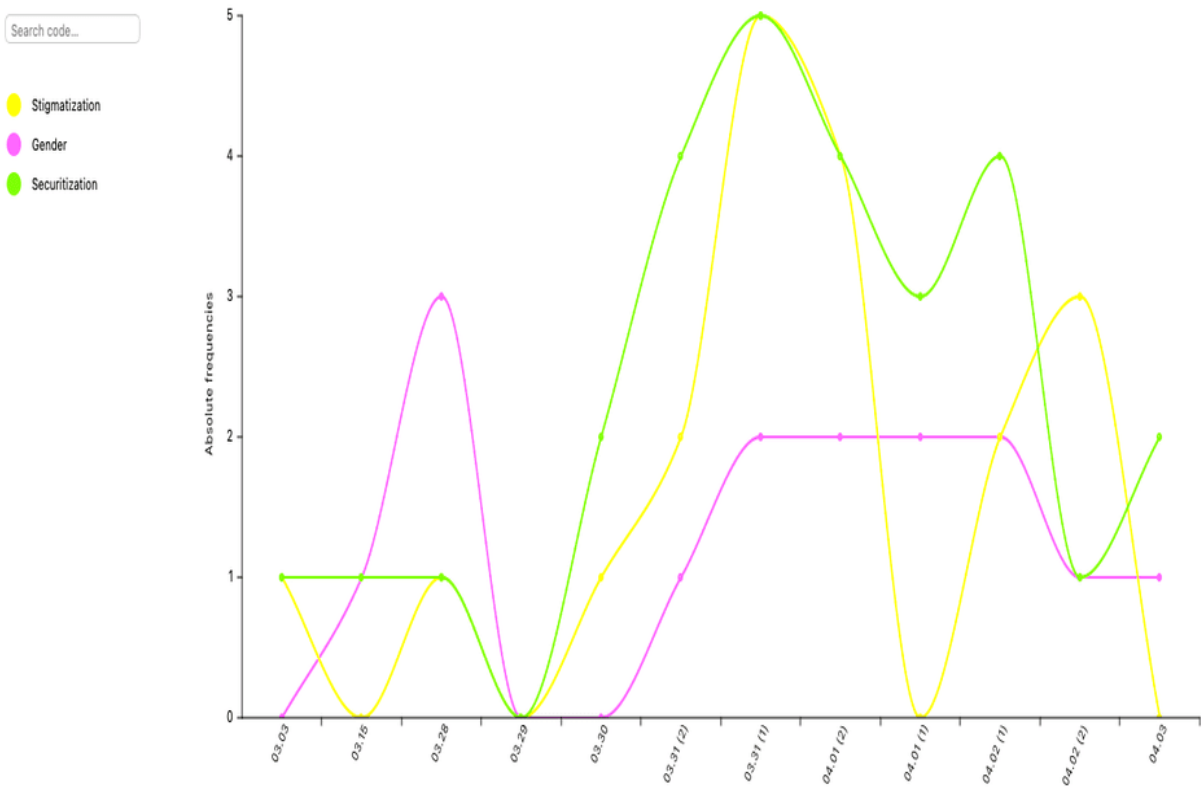

Figure 7: Code Trends of Orbán

This is one of the notable differences between Orbán, Erdoğan, and Soylu. Orbán is different from Erdoğan and Soylu in terms of the level of explicitness with which

queer people are referred in political speeches. In the case of Turkey, both Erdoğan and Soylu mention ″LGBT” specifically; the word ″LGBT” constructs their securitizing narratives to polarize their voters. In contrast, Orbán′s political speeches pursue a more strategic way. In order to polarize and strengthen his own voter base, Orbán names ″them” as ″gender ideology,” “gender madness,” “EU,” who are aiming to destroy the sanity of Hungary and brainwash Hungarian children. The lack of ″LGBT as subject” code (see Figure 7) in Orbán′s speeches further supports this argument and suggests that anti-gender discourse can still be implemented without openly mentioning LGBTQ+ individuals.

Stigmatization can be observed as a central discursive tool in all three politicians, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Süleyman Soylu, and Viktor Orbán; however, the tone, severity, and political purpose of the stigmatization depend on each politician′s ways that reflect their own national ideologies and strategic aims. Their speeches illustrate diverse types of targeting gender and sexual minorities, covering strategies from symbolic exclusion to dehumanization.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan′s stigmatization strategy is ideological and consists of an amalgamation of religious conservatism and Turkish nationalism. His discourse mainly draws queer individuals and anything against the *aile yapısı* (family structure) as moral threats to the nation and its Islamic values, and this aligns closely with the ″vilification frames” outlined by Mehran et al. (2024), where women or queer individuals are not only stigmatized yet constantly blamed for broader social and political issues. Even the times when he does not directly name LGBTQ+ identities, he refers to them via mentioning cultural erosion, the opposition, and NGOs in order to frame queer individuals as unfit to the nation′s culture and religion. Through such repetitions, Erdoğan also frames his own coalition as an advocate of the holy family structure and the opposition as the advocate of deviance and perversion in order to create a binary in which only the ruling alliance represents the nation′s moral core.

Figure 5 shows a sharp spikes in stigmatization, more than securitization, which makes him a different case from Soylu, who relies on securitization more than

stigmatization, also the presence of gender code is much higher in Erdoğan than Soylu since his discourse revolves around family, youth and incentives for marriage. Specifically, his Gender code peaks on May 26th, when he doesn't mention LGBT the same day, which demonstrates how he could move his audience in terms of gender without directly mentioning queer people. Lastly, in contrast to Orbán, who only externalizes "gender ideology" as a Western import ideology, Erdoğan combines externalization with internalization of gender and LGBTQ+ by accusing domestic actors such as opposition parties, mayors, and NGOs of allying with those perverse movements.

In contrast, Süleyman Soylu implements a far more aggressive and explicit form of stigmatization. As Interior Minister, Soylu stigmatizes LGBTQ+ individuals by framing them as agents of Western degeneracy and moral threats to the Turkish culture. In one of his speeches, he equated queer rights with bestiality, stating, *" LGBT+Q diyorlar ya, onun içerisinde hayvanla insanın evlenmesi de var.*[12] *"* (Soylu, April 28) directly dehumanizing LGBTQ+ people rather than relating their unholiness to Turkish family structure like Erdoğan. His discourse is heavy with security and threat language, even when stigmatizing, aiming to provoke the feeling of disgust in his audience. As evidenced in the Figure 5, stigmatization remains consistently high throughout April and May, still less than securitization in general since Soylu′s discursive strategies mainly focus on securitization, also, the lack of LGBT code in May 4th yet the peak of securitization at the same day, demonstrates his approach can also securitize without directly naming LGBT. However, unlike Erdoğan′s family and gender-oriented stigmatization of queer people, Soylu′s language is intentionally inflammatory and more violent, designed to incite immediate emotional and political reactions such as disgust, dehumanization, and demonization.

Viktor Orbán′s stigmatization strategy mirrors Erdoğan′s in terms of ideological grounding (family and youth) but differs in terms of style and word choices. Orbán′s discursive strategy relies on a legislative tone and evading direct references to

[12]" You know they say LGBTQ+, well, that also includes marriage between humans and animals" (Soylu, April 28)

feminists and queer people, and that strategy revolves around the banner of ″child protection.” He frames gender as ″madness” and ″insanity” in order to indirectly frame LGBTQ+ people and feminists as insane people threatening Hungarian children and families. In his referendum campaign, one of the questions asked was, ″Do you support the promotion of sex reassignment treatments for minors?” even though those treatments were not performed on anyone under 18, by adding that question in the referendum, Orbán attempted to transform a question of queer rights into a moral emergency. As can be seen in the graph, Orbán′s stigmatization is the second most used tag after securitization; however, Orbán rarely uses vulgar or dehumanizing language like Soylu. Instead, he stigmatizes LGBTQ+ and anyone who is against traditional gender norms by framing them as Western, insane, Soros-backed.

Additionally, by using frames like ″western gender insanity” and describing Hungary as ″an island of tranquility” amidst the West′s supposed decline, he further polarizes his own voter base towards ″them,” the group which he stigmatizes via children, family, parental rights, and education without naming them directly. His stigmatizing discourse peaks around March 31st to April 2nd, as shown in the Figure 7, where stigmatization and securitization sharply increase alongside gender-related rhetoric, demonstrating how child protection narratives are mobilized to stigmatize without naming.

To summarize; Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán implement stigmatization as a method of governance, strategically othering gender and sexual minorities to consolidate their own voter base and outline national identity. Erdoğan's rhetoric blends religion and nationalism and traditional gender roles (especially motherhood) to shape societal norms, evident in symbolic peaks around late May. Soylu, meanwhile, takes a more clear-cut and emotional approach, fusing moral panic and dehumanization based on disgust, clearly reflected in his consistently high graph lines for stigmatization and LGBT references. Orbán, on the other hand, demonstrates a more refined, appropriate style of stigmatization, using child protection to frame gender identity and queerness as unfit to Hungarian traditions. This allows Orbán to construct a facade of legality and reason, and he implements his anti-gender agenda behind this

facade. Despite their differences in terms of style and usage of words, all of them utilize stigmatization to mobilize public fear, polarize their own audience against ″them," and justify the marginalization of dissenting identities under the guise of child protection, morality, or tradition.

5.2 Discourse Analysis of Leaders

While the previous sections focused on the content of leaders' speeches through word and code trend analyses, this section further examines the meaning-making process of language itself. In other words, the analysis shifts from identifying *what* is said most frequently to understanding *how* language constructs reality, produces knowledge, and legitimizes power. This move is made through the lens of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), which views discourse not merely as communication but as a system that shapes subjectivities, regulates social behavior, and structures political possibilities.

As introduced in Section 5.1., the key concepts of securitization and stigmatization remain central, highlighting how leaders frame certain groups as threats or deviant outsiders. In this section, these are supplemented with two additional Foucauldian concepts;

Panopticism: Derived from Michel Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon," this concept refers to disciplinary power that functions through surveillance, visibility, and internalized control. In political discourse, panopticism appears when leaders construct narratives that normalize the constant monitoring of citizens' behavior, morality, and conformity to national or cultural ideals. Here, even when direct coercion is absent, individuals regulate themselves out of fear of being watched or judged (Foucault, 1977).

Biopolitics: Foucault's notion of biopolitics refers to the regulation of populations through policies and discourses concerned with life, health, reproduction, and sexuality. It marks a shift from sovereign power (which decides over life and death) to modern power that seeks to manage life itself by optimizing some groups while marginalizing or excluding others. In the context of this thesis, biopolitics becomes even more relevant in the leaders' focus on family, reproduction, and demographic

survival, framing women's bodies and LGBTQ+ identities as central sites of national security and cultural struggle (Foucault, 1977).

Through these concepts, the discourse analysis in this section seeks to demonstrate how Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán do not simply describe social realities but actively shape them, constructing enemies, prescribing moral orders, and governing life itself through the discursive intertwining of surveillance, fear, and control.

5.2.1 Discourse Analysis of Erdoğan

Analyzing Erdoğan's speeches deciphers a weaponized emotional rhetoric that sharply divides "enemy" and "nation" along moral, religious, and gendered lines (Ahmed, 2014, p. 42). Non-conforming womanhood and queerness become symbols of deviance used to deepen societal polarization. Erdoğan securitizes LGBTQ+ identities by equating them with groups like the PKK and FETÖ, framing them as existential threats rather than political opponents. Central to his discourse is the "*aile yapısı*" (traditional family), portrayed as the nation's moral fortress, casting LGBTQ+ people as threats to Turkey's ethical fabric (Gaufman, 2023). "LGBT" operates not as a community but as a symbolic dumping ground for all that is anti-national, anti-faith, or Western. Erdoğan's stigmatization conflates queerness with enemies of the state and portrays LGBTQ+ individuals as morally incompatible with the ideal "*Anadolu insanı*[13]" (Anatolian person) (Erdoğan, April 19). This binary "we" as faithful and national, "they" as perverse and immoral, ostracizes non-conforming identities entirely.

His rhetoric heavily relies on fear and sexualized shame, framing LGBTQ+ rights as threats to youth and national identity. Erdoğan dehumanizes LGBTQ+ people as an invasive threat, weaponizing youth against them: *"Evlatlarımızı sapkın emellerine kurban etmek isteyen LGBT'cilere bakan herkes bunu görür.*[14]*"* (Erdoğan, May 12). This language does not merely stigmatize; it also operates through panopticism. By asserting that "everyone can see" the threat of LGBTQ+ people, Erdoğan constructs

[13]" Anadolu insanı" refers to a constructed cultural ideal in Turkish nationalist discourse, representing the "true," "authentic," and "morally upright" Anatolian rural or small-town citizen. This figure is often portrayed as honest, hardworking, loyal, and embodying traditional values, especially regarding family, religion, and gender roles.

[14]" Everyone who looks at the LGBT people who want to sacrifice our children to their perverse desires can see this." (Erdoğan, May 12)

an imagined gaze of collective surveillance, where citizens are called upon to monitor and identify "deviant" subjects. The implication is that society itself becomes the guard tower, constantly watching for corruption of the nation's children. In this way, Erdoğan's discourse transforms the public into both the watchers and the watched, fostering an environment of self-policing morality aligned with state ideology. At the same time, this rhetoric draws on biopolitics, positioning youth as the biological and moral future of the nation. By framing LGBTQ+ rights as endangering "our children," Erdoğan constructs reproduction and demographic continuity as sites of political struggle. The family and the child are securitized as vital resources, and LGBTQ+ people are cast as biological and cultural threats to national survival. Here, biopolitics and panopticism intersect: while society is mobilized to surveil and discipline, the state claims authority over managing life itself by deciding which bodies and identities are allowed to flourish, and which must be excluded in order to safeguard the nation (Foucault, 1975).

Building on this, Erdoğan further portrays LGBTQ+ movements not merely as individual deviations but as organized societal threats, emphasizing their potential to undermine family structures, youth, and national values. As he declares, *"LGBT türü akımların bireylerin kendi dünyalarında yaşadığı sapkınlıklar olmaktan çıkıp toplumsal dayatmaya dönüşmesi milli varlığımızı tehdit eder. Bunun için biz asla bu tür sapkın akımların meşrulaştırılmasına izin veremeyiz. Bu yöndeki gayretleri tasvip de edemeyiz. AK Parti olarak ülkemizde LGBT'nin savunulmasına karşı da, yaygınlaştırılmasına da karşı da mücadelemizi sonuna kadar yürüteceğiz. LGBT'yi savunan hiç kimseye ve hiçbir kuruma da asla müsamaha göstermeyeceğiz.*[15]*"* (Erdoğan, May 12). He frames LGBTQ+ movements as organized, deliberate forces aiming to impose deviance on society. This rhetoric not only stigmatizes LGBTQ+ identities as morally corrupt but also securitizes them by presenting them as coordinated threats to Turkey's social cohesion, family structures, and national survival. Erdoğan's language signals zero tolerance, legitimizing state intervention

[15] "Movements of the LGBT type, which go beyond being deviations experienced by individuals in their own worlds and turn into societal impositions, threaten our national existence. For this reason, we can never allow the legitimization of such deviant movements. We cannot approve of efforts in this direction. As the AK Party, we will carry out our struggle to the very end, both against the defense of LGBT in our country and against its spread. We will never show tolerance to anyone or any institution that defends LGBT." (Erdoğan, May 12)

against both individuals and institutions, and mobilizes fear, outrage, and vigilance among citizens. In doing so, the discourse positions LGBTQ+ activism as a hostile force whose counter action becomes a patriotic and moral duty, reinforcing the broader AKP strategy of intertwining stigmatization, biopolitics, and panoptic surveillance in the protection of youth and the nation.

Finally, Erdoğan's emphasis on family structure (*aile yapısı*) and reproductive norms reflects a biopolitical control over life, deciding who may reproduce and belong to the nation. Through securitization, stigmatization, panopticism, and biopolitics, Erdoğan enforces a rigid national identity that excludes all but the heterosexual, nationalist, religious and moral ideal, thus putting non-conformity at risk of being labeled "LGBT".

5.2.2. Discourse Analysis of Soylu

Soylu securitizes LGBTQ+ identities by marking them as a foreign, existential threat linked to terrorism and moral decay. He groups "LGBT" with PKK and FETÖ, framing them as covert infiltrators undermining Turkish "aile" (family) and the nation's foundation (Balzacq et al., 2016). His language portrays LGBTQ+ people as enemies spreading within society and politics, delegitimizing their rights and citizenship. Soylu's rhetoric functions as a panoptic mechanism, encouraging society to surveil and police itself by internalizing homophobia and transphobia (Foucault, 1975). He invites the public to judge and expose those associated with queerness, reinforcing social control through fear and shame. "*LGBT'cileri de bir çuvala koyun, Apo'cuları*[16] *da bir çuvala koyun, Selo'cuları*[17] *da bir çuvala koyun, terör devleti kurmak isteyenleri de bir çuvala koyun, terörü belediyelere, belediyeleri teröre teslim etmek isteyenleri de bir çuvala koyun, hepsini çuvala koyun, hepsini Amerika'ya gönderin, Amerika'nın çocuklarına*."[18] (Soylu, May 4).

[16]" Apo'cular" = supporters of Abdullah Öcalan (leader of the PKK).
[17]" Selo'cular" = supporters of Selahattin Demirtaş (former HDP chair).
[18]" Put the LGBT people in a sack, put the Apo supporters in a sack, put the Selo supporters in a sack, put those who want to establish a terror state in a sack, put those who want to hand municipalities over to terror and terror over to municipalities in a sack put them all in a sack, send them all to America, to America's children." (Soylu, May 4)

Soylu's discourse actively securitizes LGBTQ+ identities by portraying them as instruments of foreign interference, threatening the nation's social fabric and youth. As he rhetorically asks, *"Bu (Kılıçdaroğlu) niye LGBT'yi Türkiye'ye getirmek istiyor? Çünkü Amerika istiyor, Avrupa istiyor diye. Aile yapımızı, gençlerimizi elimizden almak için istiyor,*[19]*"* (Soylu, April 28) he frames the United States and Europe as deliberate actors seeking to undermine Turkish family structures and national identity. By linking LGBTQ+ identities to external powers, Soylu constructs a narrative of existential threat in which these identities are not merely socially deviant but strategically deployed against Turkey's sovereignty (Ganz, 2023). This securitization is reinforced by invoking parental authority and national loyalty, mobilizing emotions of fear (Wodak, 2015), moral outrage, and vulnerability to justify heightened vigilance and opposition against both domestic LGBTQ+ communities and international actors.

Emotionally, Soylu mobilizes disgust by equating same-sex relationships with zoophilia, aiming to provoke revulsion and dehumanize LGBTQ+ individuals, " *LGBT+Q diyorlar ya, onun içerisinde hayvanla insanın evlenmesi de var.*" (Soylu, April 28). He also employs biopolitics, casting queerness as a demographic threat to Turkish society, blaming "LGBT propaganda" in media for corrupting youth and undermining traditional gender roles. "*Avrupa ve Amerika tek tip insan istiyor. Televizyonlardan beslediği tek tip bir dine tabi oldukları, evrensel hukuk diyorlar ya, evrensel tek bir dine tabi oldukları, cinsiyetsiz oldukları, hiç kimsenin aile yapısı içerisinde olmadığı tek tip insan modeli istiyor. Biz bu modele evet diyemeyiz.*"[20] (Soylu, April 28).

In Soylu's discourse, defending the traditional family equals defending the nation, making tolerance of LGBTQ+ people a risk to Turkey's survival. His combined use of securitization, stigmatization, panopticism, and biopolitics frames LGBTQ+ identities as both moral and existential enemies.

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[19] "Why do they (Kılıçdaroğlu) want to bring LGBT to Turkey? Because America wants it, because Europe wants it. They want to take our family structure and our youth away from us."

[20]" Europe and America want a single type of human being. They want a model fed through television, subject to a single religion they impose under the name of universal law, a model without gender, without anyone belonging to a family structure—a uniform human model. We cannot say yes to this model." (Soylu, April 28)

5.2.3. Discourse Analysis of Orbán

Orbán's speeches avoid mentioning "LGBTQ+" explicitly, yet he uses indirect terms like "gender insanity," "child protection," to stigmatize and securitize non-heteronormative identities as threats to national identity, as previously discussed. His child protection referendum frames gender as a foreign, ideological weapon undermining Hungary's moral fabric, transforming gender identity into a national security issue that justifies exceptional measures. Orbán portrays Hungary as an "island of sanity" (Orbán, March 31) resisting Western "gender madness," linking gender ideology to foreign influence and cultural decay. Rather than attacking LGBTQ+ people directly, he uses moral distancing, labeling gender discourse as dangerous propaganda to stigmatize queer identities indirectly and portray them as threats to children and traditional family values: ″A father is a man, a mother is a woman, leave our children alone.") (Orbán, March 15).

His biopolitics centers on children as symbols of the nation's future, regulating who can be parents and excluding non-heteronormative families. The referendum removes educational authority from experts, handing it to ideologically aligned parents, creating a climate of panopticism where teachers self-censor (Foucault, 1975) due to fear of social and political backlash "If children are exposed to things in school that make the job of parents harder, then the school is doing something they have no authorisation to do." (Orbán, March 31). Orbán's rhetoric subtly mobilizes emotions of disgust and loss of "common sense," framing acceptance of gender diversity as surrender to Western "madness".

Orbán extends this logic further by ridiculing what he terms "gender insanity," framing it as both absurd and externally orchestrated. As he declared, "The nature of this gender insanity is that its advocates cannot be taken seriously at first. It is not about a passing fad but about well-organized forces working to promote certain concepts on life, and these forces are powerful Western European human rights NGOs" (Orbán, March 31). This rhetoric blends stigmatization and securitization: on the one hand, he dismisses gender equality as irrational and "insane," cultivating emotions of ridicule and disgust (Ferree, 2004); on the other hand, he portrays it as the deliberate project of hostile, well-organized external actors. By tying gender discourse to foreign NGOs, Orbán reconfigures civil society and transnational human

rights networks into agents of cultural colonization, casting them as existential threats to Hungary's sovereignty and social fabric. In this way, the rejection of "gender insanity" is not only a matter of national identity, but also a securitized defense of the Hungarian society against perceived Western encroachment.

Through intertwined strategies of securitization, stigmatization, biopolitics, and panopticism, he constructs a nationalist narrative that marks non-traditional gender identities as both deviant and existential threats to Hungary's identity and children's future. To conclude, while Soylu and Erdoğan continuously stigmatize and securitize by emphasizing on LGBTQ+ identities and family, unlike Soylu and Erdoğan, Orbán does not say LGBTQ+ directly, rather, his constant rhetoric revolves around children and it is always present.

5.3. Conclusion for the Analyses of Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán

Together, the speeches of Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán reveal overlapping yet distinct strategies of stigmatization and securitization; all three politicians, by emphasizing gendered frames, attempt to shape public perception and reconstruct the limits of moral and national belonging in order to strengthen their voter base and further boost polarization. On the one hand, Orbán′s discourse revolves around the figure of the child as the innocent victim of "gender ideology," worthy of being securitized. On the other hand, Erdoğan reinforces a moral dichotomy by placing″ LGBT" against moral and traditional concepts such as ″family,*" "Allah,"* and ″Türkiye,*"* thus stigmatizing both queer individuals and political opposition as immoral and non-traditional identities, harmful to Turkey. Lastly, Soylu prefers a more expansive security-oriented discourse, where he places LGBTQ+ identities onto a broader universe of ideological and geopolitical threats, connecting them to terrorism and Western interference. In all of the three cases, securitization does not merely identify danger, it actively constructs hierarchies of legitimacy and exclusion via selected enemies. Those deemed morally and nationally ″undeserving" are stigmatized and then framed as unworthy of legitimacy and protection and eventually rendered unworthy of a place within the imagined national community.

The findings of this chapter support additional literature mentioned above, emotional securitization, as conceptualized by Ganz (2023), provides a crucial lens: emotions

such as fear, disgust, and national pride are strategically mobilized to justify the exclusion of minorities. Soylu's invocation of zoophilia to describe LGBTQ+ people exemplifies this mechanism, provoking disgust and reinforcing moral binaries. Similarly, Gaufman's (2023) work on gendered vulnerability and fragile masculinity helps explain how leaders rhetorically feminize the nation to cast themselves as its masculine protectors, evident in Erdoğan's repeated juxtaposition of *"aile"* (family), *"Türkiye",* and *"Allah"* against *"LGBT"* and opposition figures.

Abstract enemies, such as "gender ideology," rather than explicitly naming LGBTQ+ individuals, further illustrate Graff and Korolczuk's (2022) argument about the centrality of abstraction in anti-gender movements. Pető (2021) and Heikkilä & Kmak (2023) show how child protection and "vulnerabilization" narratives position certain subjects as deserving of care while casting others as dangerous. Linguistic patterns, or what Mehran et al. (2024) term "gendered frames," reveal the deliberate pairing of terms such as *child*, *family*, *terror* with *gender ideology*, producing affective associations that reinforce securitization and stigmatization.

Lastly, the combination of content analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis proved essential in uncovering these dynamics. Content analysis quantified recurring co-occurrences, providing an empirical foundation that mitigates selective interpretation, while discourse analysis revealed how these words function to construct meaning, enact panoptic surveillance, and perform biopolitical control. Alone, each method would capture only part of the picture: content analysis identifies patterns. Still, it cannot fully explain their ideological or emotional function, and discourse analysis interprets meaning but may overstate isolated instances. Together, they demonstrate that leaders construct sustained, emotionally charged discursive spheres where gender, sexuality, and family become central sites of national threat, moral governance, and political mobilization.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I aimed at examining the way right-wing leaders in Turkey and Hungary have utilized anti-gender discourse as a tool for polarization and strengthening their voter base. By focusing on the rhetoric of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Süleyman Soylu, and Viktor Orbán, I attempted to unmask the mechanisms of stigmatization and securitization through which gender and sexuality are transformed into existential threats, thus consolidating political power while deepening social divisions. Through the integration of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), concepts of polarization, securitization theory, and the interpretations and studies of stigmatization, this study has illustrated how anti-gender discourse operates as a multilayered strategy of right-wing leaders in Turkey and Hungary.

6.1. Summary of Findings

This thesis examined how political elites in Hungary and Turkey use anti-gender discourse as a tool of polarization. While the literature on polarization has identified different forms, such as negative partisanship (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016), social sorting (Mason, 2015), and pernicious polarization (Somer & McCoy, 2019), it has not fully explored how elites weaponize gender and sexuality as central axes of division. Existing accounts recognize that moral debates around gender and sexuality can intensify polarization because they are difficult to compromise on, yet they fall short in analyzing how leaders strategically mobilize these issues.

This study has shown that in both cases, anti-gender discourse functions as more than a cultural grievance. Through techniques of stigmatization, securitization, biopolitics, and panopticism, leaders reframe LGBTQ+ identities and reproductive rights as existential threats to national identity, family, and children. In Turkey, Erdoğan and

Soylu consistently use stigmatization and securitization to portray LGBTQ+ identities as a “disease” or a foreign imposition. In Hungary, Orbán does not directly target LGBTQ+ people but instead builds his narrative around children, casting gender diversity as Western “madness” that undermines national survival. In both contexts, anti-gender rhetoric is deployed to produce affective and moral antagonisms, mobilize fear and disgust, and deepen polarization.

For this study, I used a small-N comparative case study design to analyze the role of anti-gender discourse in Hungary and Turkey during the most recent election periods. By focusing on the speeches of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Süleyman Soylu, and Viktor Orbán, the research systematically examined how populist leaders employ stigmatization and securitization to reinforce polarization and legitimize exclusionary politics. A combination of content analysis and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis was used to trace how women and LGBTQ+ identities were framed as moral or security threats, while traditional family structures were elevated as central to national identity. Data were gathered from party websites and news platforms, covering the month-long election campaigns in Hungary (March–April 2022) and Turkey (April–May 2023). The speeches were coded inductively into four categories: stigmatization, securitization, gender, and LGBT as subject, allowing for both quantitative pattern detection and qualitative interpretation of discursive strategies.

To visualize rhetorical tendencies, word trends and code trend graphs were generated via MAXQDA, complementing the discourse analysis with clear illustrations of emphasis and variation across leaders. Overall, this methodological approach ensured both systematic rigor and sensitivity to nuance, enabling the study to reveal how anti-gender discourse operates as a key mechanism of polarization in contemporary Turkey and Hungary.The empirical analysis has shown that Erdoğan, Soylu, and Orbán has a common ideological framework grounded in the marginalization of feminism and LGBTQ+ movement, yet they implement anti-gender discourse in distinct ways. Erdoğan most of in his speeches ties gender and sexuality to family and national unity, framing LGBTQ+ identities as incompatible with the heteronormative family structure. Soylu, by contrast, situates LGBTQ+

people within the broader security narrative, equating them with terrorism or foreign interference and thereby invoking fear-based securitization. Orbán employs a subtler yet equally exclusionary strategy, always abstracting his rhetoric into opposition to "gender ideology" and presenting himself as the defender of Hungarian children and families.

Despite these differences, all three leaders operationalize anti-gender discourse as a polarizing tool that redefines gender and sexuality as cultural and security threats. In doing so, they not only delegitimize feminist and queer activism but also strengthen their electoral base by constructing rigid boundaries. MAXQDA analyses of word and code trends confirmed the centrality of terms such as "family," "children," "LGBT," and "terror" as gendered frames (Mehran et al., 2024), deployed to combine emotional appeals with ostracism.

They also share another pattern: all three of them rely on emotional securitization (Ganz, 2023), through the combination of fear, disgust, stigma (Ferree, 2004), and moral indignation to increase urgency and danger. Furthermore, their discourses attempt to blur the divisions between internal dissenters and external enemies, portraying gender equality and queer rights simultaneously as Western impositions and domestic betrayals. These similarities stress on the transnational nature of anti-gender discourse, showing that in spite of the contextual differences, right-wing leaders increasingly draw from a shared discursive repertoire.

6.2. Rising Hate Speech, Misogyny, and Transphobia

Importantly, the conclusions of this thesis must be situated within the broader global rise of hate speech and gender-based hostility. Across the world, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia are increasingly normalized in both political discourse and everyday life, with women, queer, and trans individuals facing increasing instances of violence, harassment, and institutional exclusion (Fondation Émergence, 2024). The discursive strategies analyzed in Turkey and Hungary resonate with this transnational pattern: framing feminism as a threat to family, portraying LGBTQ+ identities as dangers to children or national morality, and reducing trans existence to

objects of fear or ridicule. These strategies not only justify restrictive policies but also fuel societal hostility that endangers marginalized groups. Therefore, the escalation of misogyny and transphobia should not be analyzed by separating it from the erosion of democracy itself. Defending inclusive politics requires recognizing that the protection of women's rights, queer and trans rights, is inseparable from the struggle against democratic backsliding.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research is constrained by certain limitations. First, while the Turkish case included both the president (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) and the then-Minister of Interior (Süleyman Soylu), the Hungarian case only focused on Prime Minister (PM) Viktor Orbán. Soylu was selected because of his central role in articulating aggressive, security-focused anti-gender discourse during the 2023 elections. However, his counterpart, Pintér in Hungary, was not analyzed, as my research found no speeches delivered on anti-gender topics by him during the same campaign period. This asymmetry may limit the comparative balance of the analysis and it also informs about the differences between politicians delivering the speeches.

Second, I relied on English translations of Orbán's speeches rather than the original Hungarian texts. While Hungary Today provides reliable translations, the use of translations introduces the risk that certain rhetorical nuances, idiomatic expressions, or culturally specific connotations may be lost or altered. This could affect the precision of discourse analysis, particularly in detecting subtle forms of stigmatization or securitization. In order to further capture the Hungarian case, Soylu's counterpart Sándor Pintér's speeches can also be integrated, even though not in the election period, the study could be more encompassing in terms of the time period to capture the other actors including Pintér. Lastly, I did not include non-verbal communication aspects of politicians', in order to fully grasp the nature of their political speeches, one may also integrate gestures, mimics, etc., to further analyze the non-verbal aspect.

For future research, these limitations highlight several possible avenues. Including a broader range of political actors, such as Hungarian ministers or opposition leaders,

would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the diffusion and contestation of anti-gender discourse. Furthermore, complementing discourse analysis with survey data could shed light on the social impact of political speech. For instance, surveys or focus groups could explore how exposure to anti-gender rhetoric influences public attitudes toward women and LGBTQ+ people, in order to see whether such discourse increases misogyny, homophobia, or transphobia in Turkey or Hungary. This would allow future studies to move beyond elite-level discourse and assess how political narratives resonate with, or shape, the broader public and their opinions on minorities and women.

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