



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
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**THE RISE OF FAR-RIGHT POPULISM IN TÜRKİYE: THE
CASE OF THE ZAFER PARTY IN 2023 ELECTION**

Master's Thesis

Emrah UZUN

Political Science

August 2024



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PLAGIARISM

I declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented according to academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work. I declare that this thesis is written according to the writing rules of the Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institute of Social Sciences.

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ÖZET

Bu tez, Zafer Partisi'nin ortaya çıkışını ve 2023 Genel Seçimleri'ndeki Aşırı sağcı popülist söylemine odaklanarak Türk siyaseti üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. 1980'lerden bu yana küreselleşme, bölgesel çatışmaları ve göçü şiddetlendirmiş, dünya genelinde popülist ve milliyetçi hareketleri körüklemiştir. Türkiye'de ise özellikle Suriye'den gelen kitlesel göç, siyasi manzarayı önemli ölçüde değiştirmiş ve sağ popülizmin yükselişine katkıda bulunmuştur. 2021 yılında Ümit Özdağ tarafından kurulan Zafer Partisi, bu dinamiklerden yararlanmış ve güçlü bir milliyetçi ve göçmen karşıtı retorik vurgusu yapmıştır.

Bu çalışma, Zafer Partisi'nin kurucu manifestosunu, gazeteleri ve medya yansıması olarak Youtube seçim mitinglerini tematik ve içerik analizi yöntemleri ile inceleyerek, partinin 2023 seçim kampanyasındaki siyasi stratejileri ve ideolojik duruşunu, söylemlerinin aşırı sağ popülizmle ilişkisini ve Türk milliyetçiliğinin göç karşıtı boyutuna katkısını anlamayı amaçlamıştır. Bu inceleme ile birlikte partinin ideolojik temellerini, söyleminin evrimini ve seçim başarılarını anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Araştırma, seçmenlerle yankı bulan üç temel temayı Göçmen Karşıtlığı ve Milliyetçilik, Atatürk İlke ve İnkılaplarına Bağlılık ve Yolsuzlukla Mücadele belirlemektedir. Bu temalar, özellikle göç ve ulusal kimlik konularında yaygın olan kamuoyu endişeleriyle partinin stratejik uyumunu yansıtmaktadır.

Bulgular, küresel olarak yükselişte olan aşırı sağ popülizminin etkisinin Türkiye'de özellikle bu seçim sürecinde görüldüğü gözlemlenmiştir. Zafer Partisi'nin 2023 seçimlerindeki etkisini büyük ölçüde oluşturduğu aşırı sağ karakterli popülist söylemlerinden aldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu söylemler sadece partinin etkisini artırmakla kalmamış aynı zamanda ilgili seçim döneminde ana söylem konularından olduğu gözlemlenmiştir.

Zafer Partisi'nin 2023 seçimlerindeki rolüne ilişkin bu analiz, Türkiye'de göçmen karşıtlığına dayanan aşırı sağcı popülist siyaseti hakkında öngörüler sunmaktadır. Bulgular Türk siyasi tarihinde göç ve göçmen karşıtı, aşırı sağcı söylemlerin gündemde olacağını gözlemlenmiştir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin değişen siyasi atmosferinde milliyetçilik ve siyasi yeniden hizalanma üzerine devam eden tartışmalara katkıda bulunmakta ve bu bakış açısıyla, Zafer Partisi'nin seçim başarısına yol açan dinamikleri aydınlatmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda çağdaş Türk siyasetini şekillendiren güçlerin daha geniş bir anlayışını sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zafer Partisi, Milliyetçilik, Göç, Sağcı Siyaset, Aşırı Sağ ve Popülizm

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the emergence of the Zafer Party and its impact on Turkish politics by focusing on its far-right populist discourse during the 2023 General Elections. Since the 1980s, globalization has exacerbated regional conflicts and migration, fueling populist and nationalist movements worldwide. In Türkiye, the mass migration from Syria has significantly altered the political landscape, contributing to the rise of right-wing populism. Founded in 2021 by Ümit Özdağ, the Zafer Party has capitalized on these dynamics, emphasizing a strong nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric.

This study aims to analyze the Zafer Party's founding manifesto, newspaper coverage, and YouTube election rallies as representations of its media presence through thematic and content analysis methods. It seeks to understand the party's political strategies and ideological stance during the 2023 election campaign, its relationship with far-right populism, and its contribution to the anti-immigration dimension of Turkish nationalism. By doing so, the research aims to shed light on the party's ideological foundations, the evolution of its discourse, and the factors underlying its electoral success. The study identifies three key themes that resonate with voters: Anti-Immigration and Nationalism, Commitment to Atatürk's Principles and Reforms, and Combatting Corruption. These themes reflect the party's strategic alignment with public concerns, particularly those surrounding migration and national identity. The findings reveal that the influence of the globally rising far-right populism was also evident in Türkiye, particularly during this election period. The Zafer Party's impact on the 2023 elections was largely driven by its far-right populist discourse. These narratives not only amplified the party's influence but also emerged as one of the dominant themes of the electoral period.

This analysis of the Zafer Party's role in the 2023 elections provides insights into far-right populist politics rooted in anti-immigration sentiment in Türkiye. The findings suggest that immigration and anti-immigration far-right rhetoric will remain significant themes in Turkish political discourse. This study contributes to ongoing debates on nationalism and political realignment within Türkiye's evolving political landscape. In doing so, it not only sheds light on the dynamics that facilitated the Zafer Party's electoral success but also offers a broader understanding of the forces shaping contemporary Turkish politics.

Keywords: Zafer Party, Migration, Right-Wing Politics, Far-Right and Populism, Nationalism

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AK Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi): AK Party

CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi): Republican People's Party

MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi): Nationalist Movement Party

DP (Demokrat Parti): Democratic Party

ZP (Zafer Partisi): Zafer Party

SP (Saadet Partisi): Felicity Party

DSP (Demokratik Sol Parti): Democratic Left Party

TUSIAD (Türkiye Sanayiciler ve İş Adamları Derneği): Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association

NAP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi): Nationalist Action Party (another name for MHP)

FP (Fazilet Partisi): Fazilet Party

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, particularly since the 1980s, globalization movements have become increasingly prominent, driven by advancements in transportation and communication, supported by the internet and technological developments. This has led to a significant and ongoing transformation, which has continuously altered social, cultural, economic, and political life at an accelerating pace. In this modern and post-modern globalized world, populism has emerged as a crucial dynamic in politics. Since the early 20th century, global events have consistently brought forth waves of populism (Judis, 2016), influencing global politics, intellectual movements, and mass actions (Krastev, 2007). Political movements and ideologies, which differ in nature and dynamics across various regions, cultures, and countries, and which arise rapidly and are difficult to control in their spread, are characterized as populist (Taggart, 2004). Although they are distinguished as either right-wing or left-wing within the political spectrum, these movements are, by their emergence, differentiated from traditional political ideologies, embodying ideologically based, society-centered movements (March, 2007).

Today, regional conflicts, economic fluctuations, and natural disasters have increasingly triggered regional and mass migrations. These migratory movements, while affecting social dynamics, have also caused discomfort in the societies of the receiving regions due to the failure to achieve successful integration. This situation has led to a rise in right-wing populism globally, resulting in increased xenophobia, racism, and intolerance toward various religions, and nationalist movements (Karataş, 2019). When examining the global political framework, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall had cultural, economic, and social consequences, particularly related to migration and displacement. These outcomes fueled populist movements, exacerbated anti-immigrant and anti-foreign sentiments, and have persistently grown since that period, now being recognized as a prominent and influential element in contemporary politics. Specifically, the Arab Spring, which began in the early 2010s and swiftly impacted Arab societies in the Middle East and North Africa, led to regime changes, internal conflicts, and significant turmoil in the region. As a result, a vast political uncertainty emerged, causing the largest migration movements since the end of World War II. The European Union countries, Türkiye, and Egypt have been the most affected by these developments, facing numerous political, economic, and social challenges. Consequently, the

political landscape in these countries has shifted, leading to the rise of nationalist, far-right, and populist movements.

When examining the fundamental factors underlying the rise of right-wing politics, nationalism, and populism, it is evident that migration plays a central role. Particularly before the 2000s, migratory movements from the Middle East and North Africa towards Europe were significant. However, these movements escalated to a massive and uncontrollable scale following key events such as the United States invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Arab Spring, the Syrian Civil War, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the aftermath of these developments, particularly in European countries, politics has increasingly leaned towards anti-immigrant sentiment, nationalism, and right-wing ideologies. Consequently, the rhetoric and actions have shifted, making migration, asylum seekers, and refugees indispensable considerations in global politics. Similarly, this issue has become highly significant for Türkiye, profoundly affecting its political landscape.

In this context, the present study examines the political discourse of the Zafer Party (ZP), which is the first political party in Türkiye to adopt a direct ideological and political stance centered around opposition to migration and migrants. The discourse of the ZP on Turkish politics is analyzed, particularly its role as a significant factor in pushing the 2023 General Elections into a second round, making it a key player in Turkish politics from 2021 onwards.

1.1. Problem and Research Objectives

The phenomenon of migration, observed throughout human history, represents a movement of individuals or masses from one place to another. Particularly after World War II, some of the largest recorded migrations include 2.9 million Afghans and Ethiopians in 1980, 1.4 million Iraqis in 1991, 2.4 million Rwandans in 1994, 1.4 million Syrians in 2014, 3.2 million Venezuelans and Syrians in 2018, and most recently, 5.7 million Ukrainians in 2022 (UNHCR, 2023). These migration movements have directly and indirectly influenced international politics, societal and cultural dynamics, and individual lives, particularly in Europe.

International migration, asylum seekers, and refugees have become significant issues for European states and, more specifically, the European Union, due to the problems caused by uncontrolled migration, such as integration challenges, rising crime rates, and imbalances in the

distribution of economic resources. These issues have led to an increase in ideological movements, with far-right and radical political parties politicizing the concept of migration, thereby reshaping the global political framework (Krzyżanowski, 2018). Studies examining the rise of the far-right in Europe suggest that public dissatisfaction and discomfort with migrants, concerns about crime, economic anxieties, and cultural conflicts are key factors driving the growth of far-right and ideological political movements (Knigge, 1998; Middleton, 2016). This phenomenon is supported by numerous studies in the literature. For example, Semyonov, Rajjman, and Gorodzeisky (2016) conducted research across 12 European countries from 1988 to 2000, finding that citizens living in areas with high concentrations of migrants were more likely to support right-wing parties. Consistent with these findings, an examination of the European political landscape in the 2000s and beyond reveals that parties, particularly in countries with high levels of migration such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark, have increasingly attributed social and economic problems to migrants, adopting anti-immigrant and ideological approaches to boost their electoral support (Deniz, 2014). For instance, the Danish People's Party's restrictive border policies and anti-multicultural rhetoric propelled the party to power (Otto & Steinhardt, 2014, p. 67), while German Chancellor Angela Merkel's generous immigration policy towards Syrian refugees led some German citizens to shift their support to the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party (Byrd, 2018).

When examining this situation in the context of Türkiye, it is clear that a variety of geopolitical, cultural, and social factors are at play. Historically, Türkiye, and more specifically Anatolia, has served as a significant transit point for migration due to its geopolitical location, acting as an intermediary or final destination for migrants and asylum seekers. Today, migrants from underdeveloped and developing countries in the Middle East and Asia seeking to reach Europe often use Türkiye as a transit route (Baykal & Yılmaz, 2020). The Arab Spring, which began in 2010, and the Syrian Civil War, which erupted in 2011, triggered mass migration movements primarily to Türkiye and neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq, with these movements later extending towards Europe (UNHCR, 2023). During this period, Türkiye, due to its geographical proximity and the open-door policy adopted by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), became the country receiving the most migrants, with reports indicating that as of 2023, 3.27 million registered Syrian refugees reside in Türkiye, and the total number, including unregistered migrants and those from different nationalities, is estimated to exceed 5 million (UNHCR, 2023).

Although Türkiye's initial open-door policy during the early years of the Syrian Civil War was met with tolerance and a positive attitude from the public, the increasing number of refugees over time, the failure to facilitate voluntary or forced repatriation, the economic and social problems caused by the high number of refugees, demographic imbalances in certain regions, and the lack of successful integration have led to growing public dissatisfaction, particularly towards Syrians. This dissatisfaction has been exacerbated by the ruling party's failure to address these concerns (Aksu Kargın, 2016; 2018a; 2018b; Erdoğan, 2014; Ferris & Kirişçi, 2016).

Over time, as economic difficulties especially pandemics such as COVID-19 and political conflicts over the 2023 Kahramanmaraş based earthquake intensified, the issue of migration in Türkiye evolved into a significant political element, influencing and reshaping the political landscape (İçduygu, 2017; Polat, 2018; Baykal, 2019; Demirtaş, 2020; Aydemir, 2022). From a broader perspective, Türkiye's status as the country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world, coupled with its economic challenges, rising crime rates, and regional tensions, has begun to alter the dynamics of Turkish politics. The problems arising from the inability to repatriate migrants (Tuncel & Ekici, 2019), the continuous increase in the number of migrants using Türkiye as a transit route to Europe (İçduygu, 2017), and the escalating economic and security issues year by year have increasingly directed public anger and dissatisfaction towards migrants (Akman, 2022).

Just as in the global and European political landscapes, mass migration has significantly affected Turkish politics, altering the activities, rhetoric, and actions of political parties. For example, since 2018, the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), has increasingly blamed the ruling AKP for the social, economic, and societal problems facing the country (Polat, 2018). Similarly, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has criticized the government's failed Syrian policy for exacerbating uncontrolled migration and disrupting social dynamics (Tuğsuz & Yılmaz, 2016). In a study conducted by Çiçek, Arslan, and Baykal (2019), the CHP's rhetoric and actions regarding migrants were examined, revealing that the party consistently highlighted the significant economic burden that Syrian refugees place on the country. In a related study by İçduygu (2017), the perceptions and evaluations of Turkish voters were analyzed, showing a growing discontent towards Arab-origin migrants and a tendency to support political parties that propose concrete and reliable plans for repatriating these migrants. Furthermore, a study by Çiçek and others (2017) examined how the İYİ Party, another opposition party, addresses the issue of migrants, revealing that the party supports plans for

repatriation, negotiations with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, and measures to ensure border security. In summary, both the literature and the Turkish political landscape reveal increasing public dissatisfaction with refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, and this dissatisfaction has been shaping and altering the Turkish political framework.

The migration waves and the transformation of the political landscape in both Europe and Türkiye have inevitably led to the emergence of new challenges of movements such as far-right, populist, and ideologically driven political movements in Türkiye. In this context, the ZP was founded by Ümit Özdağ on August 26, 2021. The party's strong opposition to migrants, far-right populist approaches, and nationalist rhetoric and actions distinguish it from other political parties. In just two years, the ZP has rapidly garnered a remarkable voter base. The party's activities are not only aimed at opposing the ruling party AKP due to its failed migration policies but also at criticizing other opposition parties for ignoring the country's problems or failing to mount an effective opposition (Özdemir, 2023). In summary, the migration flows in the region, Europe, and Türkiye are shaping not only voter perceptions, increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, and leading to the emergence of new political movements, ideologies, and new discourse on elections. The ZP has emerged in this context, attracting nationalist, anti-immigrant, and disillusioned voters who feel uncertain about their future.

This research discusses the historical and contemporary impact of migration on global and particularly national politics, with a focus on the rise of far right-wing populism, particularly in Türkiye. It highlights how mass migration, driven by events such as the Syrian Civil War and the Arab Spring, has exacerbated social and economic tensions in host countries, leading to the growth of anti-immigrant sentiments and the political success of far-right parties. In Türkiye, the migration issue has significantly shaped not only the political landscape but also led to the rise of discourses that contributed to the rise of the ZP, founded by Ümit Özdağ in 2021. The party's foundation is characterized by strong nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric, distinguishing it from other political movements. From the foundation the ZP has rapidly gained support among voters disillusioned with both the ruling AKP and other opposition parties, reflecting broader global trends where migration issues drive the formation and success of populist and nationalist movements.

In reflecting on this, it's clear that migration has become a critical political issue that not only affects the lives of those migrating but also reshapes the societies they enter. The rise of populist and nationalist movements in response to migration challenges underscores the deep societal divides and the difficulty in managing cultural integration in an increasingly globalized

world. In Türkiye, as in Europe, the growing public dissatisfaction with migrants has fueled the achievement of political discourse and movements that capitalize on these fears and frustrations, often leading to more polarized and contentious political environments. ZP's emergence and swift rise are symptomatic of a broader global pattern, where migration becomes the focal point for political realignment and the rise of new ideological forces.

From these aspects, the research problem is to understand the dynamics and implications of the ZP's influence on the broader political landscape. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- a. What are the ZP's political strategies and ideology during the 2023 electoral campaign?
- b. Does ZP's discourse can be related to far-right populism?
- c. How did the ZP's discourses contribute to the Turkish nationalism anti-immigration discourse during the 2023 electoral campaign?

The primary objectives of this thesis are:

- a. To explore the ideological foundations of the ZP and how these ideologies resonate with or challenge existing nationalist sentiments within the Turkish socio-political landscape.
- b. To analyze the ZP's strategies and methodologies that have contributed to its electoral discourses and growing prominence within Turkish politics.
- c. To understand the broader implications of the ZP's political strategies on the discourse and sentiment surrounding Turkish nationalism.

The importance of this study lies in its exploration of the complex interplay between migration, nationalism, and populism in the context of Turkish politics, particularly through the lens of the ZP. As migration continues to be a defining issue in both global and national politics, understanding the factors that contribute to the rise of populist movements like the ZP is crucial. This research not only sheds light on the ideological underpinnings of the ZP but also provides valuable insights into how the party's discourse and rhetoric have resonated with a significant portion of the Turkish electorate. By analyzing the ZP's impact on the broader political landscape, this study contributes to the broader discourse on nationalism, populism, and the challenges of integration in an increasingly globalized world. Furthermore, it offers a nuanced

understanding of the evolving dynamics of Turkish politics, highlighting how migration-related issues are shaping new political identities and realignments.

1.3. Thesis Structure

This thesis titled *The Rise Of Far-Right Populism in Türkiye: The Case Of The Zafer Party in the 2023 Election* aims to provide a comprehensive investigation into the role and impact of the ZP within Turkish politics. Beginning with an extensive introductory chapter, the thesis will introduce the emergence of the Zafer Party and its significant contribution to Turkish nationalism, laying the foundation for a detailed analysis. Subsequently, a comprehensive literature review will contextualize the party's rise within the historical, ideological, and scholarly frameworks surrounding political parties, nationalism, discourse analysis, and campaign strategies. The following chapters will undertake a multifaceted exploration, examining the Zafer Party's strategies and ideological foundations, as well as the evolution of its discourses and their alignment with prevailing nationalist sentiments. The study will delve into the party's influence on Turkish nationalism discourse, analyzing its resonance with public sentiment and its role in shaping political discourse.

Additionally, the research will rigorously evaluate the party's electoral strategies, assess their effectiveness, and compare them to the broader political landscape, providing valuable insights into their implications. Furthermore, the thesis will investigate the role of media in shaping the discourse of nationalism and its portrayal of the ZP, assessing the media's impact on public perceptions and political discourse. The conclusion will summarize the key findings, reflecting on the significance of the ZP in reshaping political discourse and offering recommendations for further research in the field.

Overall, this thesis argues that the Zafer Party (ZP) has significantly reshaped the Turkish political environment by emphasizing rising nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments, effectively transforming from a slight political movement into a major contender in the 2023 general elections. Through a detailed analysis of the party's ideology, campaign strategies, and discourse, this study explores how the ZP's focus on migration and nationalism has resonated with the electorate, challenging both the ruling party and the traditional opposition, and positioning the ZP as a pivotal force in contemporary Turkish politics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical and historical frameworks that are fundamental to understanding the Zafer Party's (ZP) rise and impact on Turkish politics. It begins by examining the significant political developments in Türkiye following the 2016 coup attempt, highlighting how these events shaped the country's political landscape leading up to the 2023 elections. Additionally, this section delves into the global and national rise of far-right politics, focusing on the socio-economic and political conditions that have fueled populist and nationalist movements both worldwide and in Türkiye.

The importance of this section lies in its role as the foundation for analyzing the Zafer Party's influence. By exploring existing literature on populism, nationalism, and far-right movements, this review contextualizes the ZP's emergence within broader political trends. This theoretical grounding is essential for understanding how the ZP has not only capitalized on anti-immigrant sentiment but also redefined political discourse in Türkiye. Thus, this literature review offers the necessary scholarly background to assess the ZP's electoral success and its broader implications for Turkish politics.

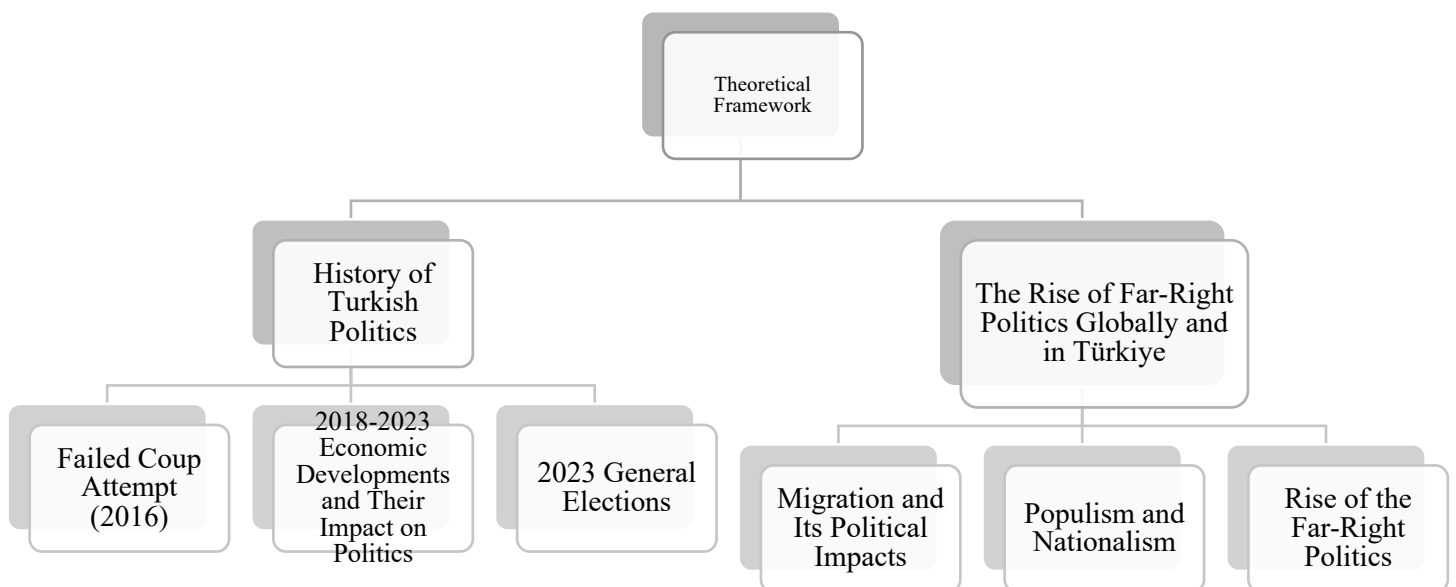


Figure 1: Analytical and Theoretical Framework

2.1. History of Turkish Politics

In this part of the study, the recent history of Turkish politics and the evolution of the Turkish political framework from the near past to the present are examined. Within this context, the period following the July 15, 2016, FETÖ coup attempt and its aftermath are considered. The decision to focus on the period from 2016 onwards is due to several critical factors: the significant impact of the coup attempt and its aftermath on Turkish politics, the intense migration movements experienced during this time, and the onset of economic contraction, all of which have notably influenced the political landscape in Türkiye.

When the history of Turkish politics was examined from past to present it could be stated that the 1950 election was a pivotal point. The unexpected results of the May 1950 election marked a dramatic shift in Türkiye's political environment. The Democrat Party (DP) received 53.35 percent of the vote and 408 seats, while the Republican People's Party (RPP) secured 38.38 percent of the vote but only 39 House members. This outcome, influenced by the winner-take-all system, reflected the electorate's desire for change. İsmet İnönü, leader of the RPP, attributed the party's defeat to the "ingratitude" of the electorate, highlighting the challenges faced by established parties in adapting to new political dynamics. Following the DP victory, the old civil-military bureaucracy lost control, leading to an identity crisis and significant shifts in political roles. By outlining how the DP had distorted political authority and lost regard for the press, the army, the university, and the constitution, the Onar Commission legitimized the intervention when it handed in its preliminary report on May 28. Before regaining civilians' access to political power and the legal system of governance, the commission suggested establishing an entirely new state and social structure.

Afterward, the 1970s in Türkiye were characterized by political turmoil, ideological clashes, and escalating violence. The decade began with the military's intervention in 1971, ostensibly to restore law and order. This intervention had far-reaching consequences, including the systematic dismantling of the political left and the rise of right-wing factions. Political parties' success often hinged on their ability to navigate and leverage social cleavages, reflecting the fragmented nature of the party system during this period. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 1980 coup, Türkiye underwent significant political and economic transformations. General Kenan Evren and the National Security Council (NSC) implemented sweeping changes,

including a new constitution, election laws, and institutional reforms aimed at depoliticizing the nation. The November 1983 elections restored civilian administration, but the military maintained significant influence over the political system. These reforms were designed to prevent the instability of the previous decades and to establish a more stable governance framework. The 1990s were marked by frequent changes in government, coalition instability, and economic crises. Despite attempts at economic stabilization and reforms, political fragmentation and corruption remained prevalent. The rise of identity politics, particularly the Kurdish movement, and political Islam, further complicated the political landscape. Major events like the 1999 Marmara earthquake and the subsequent economic crisis underscored the need for comprehensive reforms. The political and economic instability of the 1990s set the stage for significant changes in the early 2000s.

By the early 2000s Turkish politician environment experienced one of the biggest transformations and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) was founded in August 2001 by a group of reformist politicians, predominantly from the ranks of the disbanded Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi). This group, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, and Bülent Arınç, sought to create a political movement distinct from the traditional Islamist parties. The AKP positioned itself as a conservative democratic party, advocating for a blend of economic liberalism, social conservatism, and a commitment to Türkiye's integration into the European Union (EU) (Sayari, 2002).

In the general elections held on November 3, 2002, the AKP achieved a remarkable victory, securing approximately 34.3% of the vote and winning 363 of the 550 seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi - TBMM). This electoral success allowed the AKP to form a single-party government, a significant shift in Türkiye's traditionally fragmented political landscape. The victory was not only a testament to the party's effective campaign but also reflected the electorate's desire for a new political direction following years of instability and economic crises (Sayari, 2002).

Following its election victory in 2002 and the formation of a one-party government, the AKP got to work implementing the necessary reforms to make EU entry easier. The AKP knew full well that gaining political legitimacy in the eyes of the establishment and the non-supporting masses could be greatly aided by the European Union. In light of this, the AKP committed to implementing all reform measures required for Türkiye to be eligible to begin EU admission talks. The AKP leadership opposed the Kemalist hegemony in its promotion of Westernization by presenting itself as a fervent supporter and advocate of Türkiye's EU membership bid

(Grigoriadis, 2009). The largest opposition party, the socialist and Kemalist Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, or CHP), assisted the AKP in passing the constitutional amendments needed for the accession bid (Mecham, 2004). "Democratic Opening" was the term used to describe the AKP's actions leading up to EU membership. They had to do with changes meant to address problems faced by religious and ethnic minorities, allow economic liberalism to infiltrate the country, reorient the country to face the West rather than the East, substitute soft power for military might, and take on the role of regional intercessor. By bolstering the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, press freedom, and the rule of law, the AKP attempted to overthrow the militaristic tutelage of the bureaucracy and undermine its dominant position. To solidify its hold on power, the AKP formed political ties with liberal, democratic, practicing Muslim, Kurdish, and Islamist organizations in addition to the EU through its pro-EU and pro-democratization platform. To maintain its extraordinary grasp on the voters, it also skillfully employed a variety of strategies in its political rhetoric, including victimization, Islamism, neo-conservatism, and neoliberalism (Kaya, 2015). The AKP portrayed itself to the public as a center-right conservative democratic party, not as an ideology-based Islamic party, but rather as a party focused on addressing societal issues including welfare, economic development, transportation, health, and education. Compared to its principal adversary, the CHP, the AKP was seen as having far more serious concerns about addressing the widespread corruption that had long been a part of the Turkish economy. This was particularly important after the 1999 Marmara/Izmit earthquake and the ensuing economic crisis when voters sharply criticized pro-secular center-left and center-right parties as dishonest and incompetent. The AKP mayors quickly proved to be highly successful in providing services and running clean, transparent governments, especially after taking office in several important municipalities and the megacities of Istanbul and Ankara. Within this framework, the AKP persuaded the public that the eradication of the corruption and cronyism that had long plagued Türkiye's banking and financial sector was the path to true economic advancement (Kaya, 2015). Thirdly, the AKP extended social state benefits to millions of households, allowing them to receive both cash and in-kind welfare assistance. This was done with a strong emphasis on the subject of social justice within the party's policy.

2.1.1. Failed Coup Attempt (2016)

On the night of July 15, 2016, a faction loyal to the Gülenist movement within the Turkish Armed Forces attempted to overthrow the government. The coup plotters, who identified themselves as the "Peace at Home Council," seized control of several key locations in Ankara, Istanbul, and other major cities (Afşar, 2019). They declared martial law and announced their intention to restore democracy and human rights. However, the coup was met with strong resistance from loyalist forces within the military, police, and large segments of the civilian population (Çakı, 2018). President Erdoğan, who was on vacation at the time, called on the people to take to the streets in defiance of the coup plotters. Thousands of citizens responded, confronting the coup forces and ultimately thwarting their efforts. By the early hours of July 16, the government had regained control, and the coup attempt was effectively quashed. In the aftermath of the failed coup, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency, which lasted until July 2018 (Duman, 2018). During this period, the government launched a sweeping crackdown on suspected coup plotters and their alleged supporters. Tens of thousands of military personnel, civil servants, judges, and academics were purged from their positions, and many were arrested (Ülger ve Özdemir, 2018). The government accused the followers of Fethullah Gülen, a cleric living in exile in the United States, of orchestrating the coup attempt. Gülen and his movement, known as the Gülenists, were designated as a terrorist organization by the Turkish government, which sought his extradition from the United States (Ercan, 2017). The state of emergency also saw a significant curtailment of civil liberties and political freedoms. Numerous media outlets were shut down, and journalists were detained. The government's actions drew criticism from international human rights organizations and Western governments, who expressed concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions and the rule of law in Türkiye (İşcan, 2018).

The failed coup attempt and the subsequent state of emergency had a lasting impact on Turkish politics. They provided Erdoğan and the AKP with the impetus to consolidate power further (Karagöl, 2017). In 2017, a controversial constitutional referendum was held, which resulted in significant changes to the Turkish political system. The referendum, which passed with a narrow margin, transformed Türkiye from a parliamentary system to a presidential system, granting the president sweeping executive powers (Sunugur, 2016). Erdoğan was elected as the first president under this new system in June 2018, solidifying his control over

the country's political landscape. These events have significantly shaped the political and social dynamics of Türkiye in the 2010s, leading to increased political polarization, a more authoritarian governance structure, and ongoing debates about the future of democracy and human rights in the country (Alkan, 2016). The legacy of the Gezi Park protests and the failed coup attempt continue to influence Turkish politics and society, reflecting the complex interplay of power, resistance, and reform in contemporary Türkiye.

2.1.2. 2018-2023 Economic Developments and Their Impact on Politics

In this section, the economic developments in Türkiye from 2018 to 2023 and their consequent effects on the political landscape are examined. This period has been characterized by significant economic challenges, including currency fluctuations, rising inflation, and shifts in economic growth. These economic factors have played a pivotal role in shaping political discourse, influencing policy decisions, and affecting public sentiment. Analyzing this timeframe provides valuable insights into how economic dynamics can directly impact political stability and governance in Türkiye.

As of 2024, Türkiye hosts a population of over 85 million citizens, a figure that does not include the more than 3.5 million migrants under temporary protection or the significant number of undocumented migrants whose exact numbers remain unknown (TÜİK, 2024). One of the primary challenges related to Türkiye's population is the presence of undocumented migrants. Their numbers are indeterminate, their movements untraceable, and as a result, they cause significant discrepancies in official statistics. For instance, according to UNHCR data, nearly half of the migrants attempting to enter Greece via the Greek islands had previously stayed in Türkiye, and half of those migrants had no official registration in Türkiye (Adalı and Türkyılmaz, 2020). This unaccounted population affects key economic indicators, leading to noticeable distortions in metrics such as per capita income and growth rates. With limited economic resources being distributed among an indeterminate population, per capita income and growth rates are likely even lower than reported. In summary, the increase in irregular and undocumented migrants exacerbates the economic challenges, making the economy more vulnerable (Akçay, 2021).

When examining the key stages of economic vulnerability in Türkiye, it becomes clear that the shift to the Presidential Government System had significant political and economic repercussions.

Before the system change following the 2018 elections, Türkiye experienced high but fragile growth sustained by debt (Bakiner, 2018). This was soon followed by a currency and balance of payments crisis, leading to an economic contraction. The ruling party's defeat in the 2019 local elections and the subsequent high but uneven growth, fueled by high inflation as a preparatory measure for the upcoming general election, further exacerbated the economic challenges (Balta, Demiralp ve Demiralp, 2021). These issues manifested in high inflation, a noticeable decline in purchasing power, and a contraction in economic activity, ultimately contributing to a decline in the ruling party's support.

Türkiye's economy, characterized by its reliance on external resources and its position as an energy importer, consistently runs a chronic current account deficit. Following the 2017 Presidential Government System referendum and the 2018 early elections, the government pursued monetary and fiscal expansion, leading to increased money supply, credit growth, and an economic revival driven by borrowing (Ecevit ve Celep, 2018). However, following President Erdoğan's victory in the June 2018 elections, the anticipated economic stabilization was derailed by tensions with the United States over the Pastor Brunson incident. The resulting economic crisis triggered a significant devaluation of the Turkish Lira, and nominal per capita income in dollar terms fell below 2013 levels. Subsequently, the AKP's loss of the Istanbul and Ankara mayoralties in the March 2019 local elections was widely interpreted as a consequence of economic difficulties (Yağcı ve Harma, 2023). The economic stagnation persisted throughout 2020, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to widespread business closures.

As the economic crisis became more pronounced, the government allowed the purchasing power of the Turkish Lira to decline, making exports more competitive in currency terms and adopting an export-oriented growth strategy. However, a major economic rupture occurred when President Erdoğan advanced his theory that low interest rates were not inflationary (Yağcı, 2022). Between 2018 and 2021, the Central Bank, attempting to balance the president's directives with market pressures, depleted significant foreign exchange reserves, and belatedly raised interest rates following substantial currency jumps, but ultimately failed to prevent a vicious cycle of ongoing currency depreciation. Consequently, between July 2019 and July 2021, three Central Bank governors either resigned or were dismissed by the president.

By the second half of 2021, the policy stance that appeared to be faltering was replaced by a more assertive low-interest-rate policy, branded as the "Türkiye Economic Model." Under this model, nominal policy interest rates were reduced by 10 percentage points between September 2021 and November 2022 (Demiralp, 2022). This approach led to inflation levels not seen since the 1990s, with policy interest rates falling to negative real levels against expected inflation, driving a consumption boom based on household and corporate borrowing. As a result, high economic growth returned in 2021 and 2022. To prevent inflation from further depreciating the already weakened Lira, an unofficial system of capital controls was gradually implemented. Measures included taxes on foreign exchange transactions, selective restrictions on bank foreign exchange movements under government directives, and the Central Bank acquiring foreign currency through unconventional channels to supply the market (Yağcı ve Oyvat, 2020).

Eventually, from the second half of 2018 to the end of 2020, Türkiye experienced significant currency depreciation and economic stagnation. The impact of this stagnation on per capita income, particularly when accounting for undocumented migrants, may have been more negative than official statistics suggest, contributing to the rise of far-right sentiment in Türkiye. Following the 2019 local election defeat, the government pursued a different approach in preparation for the next general election, focusing on lowering interest rates and stabilizing the currency through capital controls to prioritize economic growth and employment. However, this strategy ultimately led to high inflation.

In summary, the period from 2018 to 2023 in Türkiye was marked by significant economic challenges, including currency depreciation, rising inflation, and fluctuating growth rates. These issues were exacerbated by political changes, particularly the shift to the Presidential Government System, and external pressures, such as tensions with the United States. The Turkish economy, heavily reliant on external resources and burdened by a chronic current account deficit, faced further strain as the government pursued expansionary monetary and fiscal policies (Özkök, 2021). Despite attempts to stabilize the economy, including an export-oriented growth strategy and a controversial low-interest-rate policy, inflation surged to levels not seen since the 1990s. This economic turmoil, coupled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a decline in purchasing power and a contraction in economic activity, contributing to the ruling party's loss of support in key local elections. In addition, the economic deterioration during this period had a profound impact on voter behavior and contributed to the rise of far-right sentiment in Türkiye (Demirgil, 2019). As economic conditions worsened, public discontent grew, particularly among those most affected by inflation and unemployment.

The government's inability to effectively manage the economy led to a loss of confidence in traditional political parties, creating a fertile ground for far-right movements that capitalized on economic grievances. These movements often framed economic problems as a consequence of migration and external influences, further fueling nationalist and xenophobic sentiments. As a result, the economic crisis not only shaped electoral outcomes but also facilitated the rise of far-right ideologies, reflecting broader global trends where economic instability drives political polarization and the growth of extremist movements. Thus this economic landscape also found a political expression, providing the foundation for the emergence of the ZP and its subsequent establishment in the political arena.

2.1.3. 2023 General Elections

Before evaluating the results of the 2023 elections, it is essential to first examine the Presidential Government System, a significant factor that shaped the path leading to these outcomes. Understanding the impact and implications of this system will provide valuable context for analyzing the election results.

Table 1. May 14, 2023 General Election Results and Number of Deputies Elected by Parties

Alliance Name	Party	Vote %	Deputy N
Cumhur Alliance	AKP	35,62	268
	MHP	10,07	50
	YRP	2,80	5
Millet Alliance	CHP	25,35	169
	İYİ	9,69	43
Emek ve Özgürlük Alliance	YSGP	8,82	61
	TİP	1,78	4
Others & Independents		5,88	-
Total		100,00	600

The introduction of the presidential system brought about profound changes in Türkiye's governance. One of the key changes was the concentration of executive power, which effectively diminished the role of the parliament. The president's ability to issue decrees allowed for swift decision-making but raised concerns about bypassing legislative scrutiny (Sayarı,

2002). The new system also altered the judiciary's structure, leading to concerns about its independence.

The Council of Judges and Prosecutors, responsible for judicial appointments, became more susceptible to executive influence, raising fears of politicization of the judiciary (Söyler, 2015). These changes were seen by many as a move towards consolidating power and reducing the checks and balances that are crucial for a functioning democracy. Since the adoption of the presidential system, Türkiye has experienced significant political and economic challenges. The economy has been marked by high inflation, a depreciating currency, and increasing debt. The government's economic policies, particularly President Erdoğan's insistence on lowering interest rates despite rising inflation, have been heavily criticized (Yılmaz and Erturk, 2023). Politically, Türkiye has faced increasing polarization. The government has been accused of cracking down on dissent, limiting freedom of speech, and using state resources to consolidate power. The state of emergency declared after the failed coup attempt in July 2016 was extended several times, allowing the government to rule by decree and leading to mass arrests and purges in various sectors, including the military, judiciary, and academia (Ödemiş, 2023). The relationship with the European Union has also been strained, with accession talks effectively stalled. Issues such as human rights abuses, media freedom, and the rule of law have been major sticking points (Hughes, 2010). In conclusion, all these developments paved the way for the outcomes of the 2023 elections, emerging as key factors behind the election results.

In 2023, marking the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye, the country held its second presidential and parliamentary elections following the transition to the Presidential Government System. These elections were conducted on May 14th, with parliamentary elections being held in a single round according to the electoral system. The distribution of parliamentary seats was finalized based on the results of this election. However, as no presidential candidate secured an absolute majority, a second round was held on May 28th between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes. This study focuses exclusively on the parliamentary election results and does not include data related to the presidential election.

A total of 24 political parties and 151 independent candidates participated in the parliamentary elections held on May 14th (YSK, 2023). The Justice and AKP and the CHP formed both electoral and list alliances, including candidates from various other parties on their own lists. A legal amendment to Article 12/A of the 5819 Parliamentary Election Law on March

13, 2018, paved the way for electoral alliances (Parliamentary Election Law, 1983). As a result, 13 parties participated in the May 14th elections under four main alliances.

The parties within the Cumhur Alliance, Millet Alliance, and Emek and Özgürlük Alliance successfully surpassed the 7% electoral threshold, and all parties within these alliances, except for the BBP, secured seats in the parliament (Parliamentary Election Law, 1983). On the other hand BBP has took 0.98 % while ATA Alliance (Zafer Party and Adalet Party) took 2.43 % of votes.

The 2023 elections, marking a significant moment in the country's history, unfolded in a highly competitive political environment. The ruling AKP faced substantial challenges in securing a majority, primarily due to erosion within its voter base due to the poor economics. Public dissatisfaction was further fueled by the government's inadequate response to two major earthquakes, concerns regarding the zoning amnesty, and rising inflation, all of which cast doubt on the AKP's prospects for re-election. Incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, representing the AKP, entered the presidential race as the candidate of the Cumhur Alliance, which included the MHP and three smaller parties. On the opposition side, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the main opposition party, the CHP was the presidential candidate of the Millet Alliance, composed of six opposition parties. Although not officially part of the Nation Alliance, the Green Left Party (YSGP) and the Labor and Freedom Alliance, which includes the HDP and various left-wing and socialist parties, also supported Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy. Additionally, Muharrem İnce, leader of the Homeland Party, and Sinan Oğan, the ultranationalist candidate of the ATA Alliance, both qualified as candidates by gathering 100,000 signatures each. Three days before the election, İnce withdrew his candidacy, although his name remained on the ballot. In the first round, Erdoğan secured 49.5% of the valid votes, while Kılıçdaroğlu garnered a significant 44.9%. Sinan Oğan exceeded expectations by receiving 5.2% of the votes. As Erdoğan narrowly missed an outright victory by just 0.5%, a runoff election between him and Kılıçdaroğlu was held on May 28. Oğan's endorsement of Erdoğan caused a split within the ATA Alliance, with its largest party, the ZP, led by Ümit Özdağ, choosing to support Kılıçdaroğlu. Ultimately, Erdoğan won the second round with 52.18% of the vote, while Kılıçdaroğlu received 47.82%. As a result, the Cumhur Alliance managed to maintain a majority in the parliament with 322 seats, although the ruling AKP recorded its worst result since 2002, securing only 36% of the vote. The MHP, the second-largest party in the alliance, received 10.1% of the votes. Although the total vote share of the People's Alliance fell just below 50%, they still secured more than half of the parliamentary

seats. On the other hand, the opposition alliance received 34% of the vote, securing 213 parliamentary seats.

The Emek ve Özgürlük Alliance, with a slight decline in votes, achieved a vote share slightly above 10% and sent 66 representatives to the parliament. Despite not surpassing the 7% electoral threshold, the ZP garnered 2.23% of the valid votes—a notable achievement for a niche party established as recently as August 2021.

To sum up, 2023 elections in Türkiye, a pivotal moment coinciding with the Republic's centennial, were marked by a competitive and tense political atmosphere. The ruling AKP faced significant challenges, exacerbated by public dissatisfaction stemming from economic hardships, government responses to natural disasters, and concerns about corruption and urban planning. Despite these challenges, the AKP-led Cumhur Alliance managed to retain a parliamentary majority, although the AKP itself saw a substantial drop in voter support, securing only 36% of the vote—its lowest since 2002. The opposition, though unable to secure a parliamentary majority, performed strongly, particularly the Millet Alliance, which garnered 34% of the vote. The ZP, a relatively new and niche party, managed to make a notable impact by securing 2.23% of the votes, reflecting the growing influence of far-right sentiments and the economic discontent fueling their rise. This outcome highlights the complex interplay between economic factors, nationalist rhetoric, and voter behavior in shaping Türkiye's current political landscape.

2.2. The Rise of Far-Right Politics Globally and in Türkiye

When the literature is reviewed, one of the most significant reasons behind the noticeable increase in far-right politics globally and in Türkiye in recent years is the surge in irregular migration flows. In this context, the concept of migration and its political impacts are first discussed, followed by an examination of the rise in far-right movements in politics.

2.2.1. Migration and Its Political Impacts

When examined from a historical perspective, migration is seen as one that has been encountered in many periods throughout history and is as old as human history itself (Çağlayan, 2006). The concept of migration is most broadly defined as the movement of individuals or groups of people from their place of residence to another location, either temporarily or permanently (Maio et al., 1994). Migration, defined as a movement of relocation, that may

occur for various reasons, including natural, social, political, and economic factors, and is classified according to these causes (Özdal, 2021). The International Organization for Migration (2009) defines migration as "the movement of a person or a group of people, either across an international border or within a state. It is a population movement, regardless of its length, composition, or cause; it includes the migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, such as family reunification." The reasons why people migrate have long been a primary focus of research, with experts and researchers identifying the fundamental drivers of migration as the improvement of living conditions and the avoidance of dangers. Migration is generally categorized into two main types: voluntary migration, which occurs when individuals choose to migrate, and forced migration, which occurs when individuals are compelled to leave their homes due to unavoidable factors such as natural disasters, war, or exile (Wodak and Matouschek, 1994; Yolcu, 2018).

Also when examining the impact of migration on nations within a historical framework, globalization emerges as a significant phenomenon. Particularly since the 1980s, globalization has led to major advancements in communication, transportation, and technology, which, in parallel with the diminishing significance of physical borders, have resulted in a significant increase in migratory movements. During this period, mass migration movements have escalated, with irregular migration becoming increasingly difficult to control, leading to the emergence of heterogeneous structures within previously homogeneous nation-states. As a result, a global sentiment of anti-refugee attitudes has begun to take shape. The underlying reasons for this include concerns about the erosion of national identities, as well as perceived threats to the concepts of citizenship and nationalism (Giddens, 2012). Additionally, the economic and social pressures that migration places on nation-states have further fueled opposition to migration and migrants (Çeçen, 2021).

A study conducted by Boyraz (2022) examined the underlying reasons behind individuals' political behaviors. According to the research, individuals tend to exhibit extreme political reactions and support radical political ideologies and views, particularly in times of economic crises, wars, famines, and situations where they feel threatened. This tendency is explained by a concept known as reactivity. In this context, the politicization of migration and the political impacts of the migration concept are also considered. It is observed that the problems arising from migration today significantly influence individuals' political behaviors, leading them to gravitate toward right-wing and far-right parties (Beyme, 2019).

The politicization of a phenomenon or issue occurs when it becomes a societal problem, leading to its discussion and the generation of solutions by different political parties, subsequently drawing the attention, behaviors, and attitudes of society towards these proposals and views (Birinci, 2008). In this process, the phenomenon or issue that undergoes politicization can become the focus of political parties' strategies, activities, and campaigns in modern politics, often resulting in polarization, division, and partisanship among voters. The concept of migration has also become a politicized issue in contemporary politics, particularly as opposition to migration has emerged as one of the most significant and popular phenomena in both global and Turkish politics. It is observed that opposition to migration is increasingly prominent within far-right politics (Hewlett and Kuhn, 2022; Baldini, Tronconi, and Angelucci, 2022). In today's democratic, election-focused political systems, politicians tend to reflect the thoughts and demands of their target and represented voters to secure votes. When viewed from this perspective, the rise of anti-migration sentiment, the ascent of far-right politics, and the resurgence of nationalist movements reflect the polarization and ideological transformation occurring within societies (Ceylan, 2019).

In summary, the politicization of migration has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary global and Turkish politics. As migration issues increasingly impact national identities, economies, and social cohesion, they have become the main topics of today's politics. The challenges posed by irregular migration, coupled with the perceived threats to national identity and economic stability, have fueled anti-immigrant sentiments and driven the rise of far-right political movements. As political actors seek to resonate with voter concerns, particularly in times of crisis, migration has become a key issue around which political strategies are formed, reflecting broader societal polarization and ideological shifts.

This process of politicization underscores the growing importance of migration in shaping modern political landscapes and the critical role it plays in the evolving dynamics of right-wing populism and nationalism.

2.2.2. Populism, Nationalism and Rise of the Far-Right Politics

In examining definitions related to populism, it becomes clear that the literature offers a wide array of interpretations. These definitions often differ in their attributes; while some researchers view populism as a negative phenomenon, others consider it a natural element of politics and modernization. Rosanvallon (2008) characterizes populism as a pathology of

modern representative democracies, whereas Laclau (2005) regards it as a force of democracy, fostering diversity. According to Kaltwasser et al. (2017), populism is a concept that must be considered in terms of its varying positive and negative effects and characteristics.

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) argue that populism should primarily be understood through the concepts of the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite." Here, the elite refers to those in leadership positions across politics, economy, media, and arts, while the pure people consist of ordinary citizens who make up the nation. There is a constant transfer of political power between these two groups. In this framework, Yılmaz and Morieson (2021) describe populism as the people's anger and anarchic attitudes toward the order imposed on them by the elites.

Mudde (2004) defines populism as a political conflict between the pure people and the corrupt elite, with the political authorities labeled as corrupt being positioned against populism. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008) define populism as an ideology shaped by the conflict between people whose values and welfare are undermined by political authorities and the resulting mutual othering of these groups. So, when examining the common characteristics of nationalism and populism, it becomes evident that both ideologies tend to simplify complex social and political issues, making them difficult to resolve (Lührmann & Hellmeir, 2020). Pastor and Veronesi (2021) argue that populism emerges as an ideology born out of inequality, where the ordinary and virtuous people are pitted against the corrupt and malevolent elites.

In contemporary politics, populism can manifest within various political styles, such as technocratic or authoritarian regimes. The key factor is the leader's interaction with the people, particularly the extent to which they can evoke or direct populist sentiments (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Additionally, the concept of populism is strongly influenced by crises, disasters, and major events, which act as driving forces for populism and are often seen as the origin points of populist movements (Taggart, 2000). Economic problems, in particular, serve as significant catalysts for populist movements, bringing other negative aspects of society to the forefront and creating a chain reaction (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). In summary, populism can be viewed as both a strengthening element of democracy and a potential threat to democratic systems. Its dual nature varies depending on the context in which populism arises and the approach of its leaders. Therefore, any evaluation of populism's impact must consider both aspects.

Populism, rather than seeking the best and most sustainable solutions to the people's problems, tends to support leaders—often labeled as populists—who propose disruptive and destructive measures that offer quick gratification. This support can sometimes lead to conflicts

with the democratic system and its institutions (Mudde, 2004). Dinç (2016) describes populism as a movement that flows from the corrupt elite downward to the pure people, portraying it as an uprising by the pure people in a political system dominated by corrupt elites. Generally, such populist movements are characterized by the rapid and often destructive acceptance of solutions and proposals put forward by a leader who stands against the political elites and claims to act in the best interests of the people (Müller, 2020).

Nationalism, on the other hand, is seen as one of the key drivers of populism and is centered around the concept of the nation. Conceptually, nationalism is an ideology that seeks to distinguish and elevate a nation through its identity, culture, language, race, and history, while also aiming to unite its members around a sense of belonging (Sommer, 2013). Nationalism can serve as a force that fosters national unity and cohesion within the framework of nation-states, but it also has the potential to exclude, alienate, and incite xenophobia against those who are not considered members of the nation (Jansen & Borggräfe, 2007). Throughout history, nationalist movements have often fueled independence struggles and internal divisions, with nationalism ideologically prioritizing national identity and interests above all other political and social goals, shaping societal life accordingly.

On the other side, nationalism has been a powerful ideological force in the formation of political parties, advocating for national self-determination, sovereignty, and the preservation of national identity. Nationalism can take various forms, from civic nationalism, which is inclusive and based on shared political values, to ethnic nationalism, which is exclusive and based on common ancestry and culture (Smith, 1991). In Türkiye, nationalism has played a significant role in the formation and evolution of political parties. The early Republican period saw the establishment of a secular, civic nationalism under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which was institutionalized through the CHP. This form of nationalism aimed to create a unified, modern nation-state, distancing itself from the Ottoman multi-ethnic empire (Karpas, 1959). Over the decades, Turkish nationalism has evolved, incorporating more conservative and religious elements. The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) reflects a form of nationalism that blends ethnic identity with a strong state ideology. This form of nationalism emphasizes the preservation of Turkish culture and identity against perceived external threats and internal challenges. The MHP's ideological stance has influenced its policies on issues such as national security, immigration, and cultural preservation. More recently, the emergence of the Zafer Party can be seen as part of this nationalist tradition. The Zafer Party emphasizes the protection of Turkish identity and sovereignty in response to contemporary challenges such as immigration

and globalization (Zafer Party Manifesto, 2021). This form of nationalism resonates with segments of the population who feel marginalized by globalization and the perceived erosion of national culture.

At the core of populism lies the assumption of a structurally homogeneous society, which inherently denies pluralism. In this context, populists emphasize the will of the people, bringing to the forefront the concept of the nation, a fundamental element of nationalism (Finchelstein, 2019). In conclusion, populism emerges as a protest movement driven by societal discontent and disappointment. It is inherently oppositional, serving to awaken the populace to the sources of their dissatisfaction and their political power. Similarly, populism often reveals deep-seated prejudices within large segments of the population. As a regime, populism demands the complete representation of the people; however, this is frequently interpreted as the total transfer of power to the leader, who claims to understand the true desires of the people better than they do themselves (Finchelstein, 2019).

By the way the term "far-right" is commonly used as a general term to represent various groups operating in the political arena as a far-right political movement. It is employed to describe and express political parties, groups, populist organizations, and ideologies. The inclusion of such a diverse array of phenomena, sides, and factors within the far-right makes its definition challenging and the concept itself ambiguous. According to Ignazi (1995, 2003), for a party to be positioned on the far-right, it must be located on the right side of the political spectrum, have ideological affiliations, and possess values, policies, and action plans that criticize or, in some cases, even reject the democratic system. In another definition, Betz (2004) describes far-right parties as those that are right-wing, populist, critical of the prevailing political and cultural dynamics, and supportive of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Muddle (2007) defines far-right parties as nationalist, xenophobic, defenders of the rule of law, and populist parties. Far-right parties particularly distinguish themselves through their rhetoric and actions, emphasizing societal divisions and focusing on nationalism. The core arguments of far-right parties and political movements revolve around the concept of migration, economic hardships, and nationalism, and they are ideologically divisive rather than unifying (Guibernau, 2010).

The concept of the far-right, which is difficult to conceptualize and define, is also expressed in various ways by researchers. For example, terms such as radical right, anti-immigrant, neo-populist, and populist radical right are prominent alternative definitions of the

far-right found in the literature (Berning, 2017). In a study aimed at defining far-right movements, Mudd (2010) describes these movements as those built on nationalist foundations, opposing modern phenomena, and classifying the "other" by rejecting religion, language, race, origin, culture, and ideas.

Leca (1998) states that the distinctive characteristics of nations and states such as their cultures, languages, racial distributions, borders, and languages shape these entities. When these elements begin to change or are threatened with change, political movements and ideologies defined as far-right tend to rise (Eatwell, 2004). In summary, these foundational elements that distinguish nations, nation-states, and peoples are highly correlated with political, economic, and social conditions. The far-right emerges in situations where these roots are perceived to be under threat, particularly when the threat is driven by economic, social, or political factors, and seeks to oppose the factors causing the threat (March and Mudde, 2005).

The far-right, or more extreme radical right, represents the furthest right-wing position on the political spectrum. Psychologically associated with hierarchy, the far-right advocates for the superiority of groups and factions aligned with its views, typically expressing opposition to undesirable groups and societies, sociocultural movements and ideas that do not conform to its beliefs, and races, languages, and religions perceived as inferior (Mudde, 2010). In an early definition, Betz and Immerfall (1998) described the far-right as follows: "A view that rejects the rules of the democratic system, the principle of equality, individual freedom, and the equal rights of all political actors, instead advocating an authoritarian system based on personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and religion, and considering 'violence' as a necessary tool to achieve political goals both domestically and in foreign policy." In summary, the fundamental pillars of the far-right include ethnic homogeneity, the superiority of the host race over other races, the ideology of a national society, and nationalism (Aslan, 2018). However, one of the most significant characteristics of the far-right is its operation within the framework of democracy and its populist nature, despite its extreme values.

Modern far-right parties and political movements, unlike far-right and radical movements that aim to dismantle political authority, operate by adapting to democratic processes and dynamics. They seek to change the status quo rather than the entire system (Rauta, 2013). A review of the literature reveals that populism is another concept used to explain and define the far right, with populism being considered an indispensable element of the far right. Populism, which first entered political discourse in 1892 in the United Kingdom,

was introduced to the literature through the Populist Party, which aimed to draw attention to and address the issues of the working class, such as farmers and laborers (Eren, 2017).

Over time, populism has undergone transformation and change, much like many other phenomena. Today, it is a fundamental element of right-wing parties and right-wing politics. At its core, populism divides society into "pure people" and "corrupt elites," distinguishing itself from these groups and attempting to impose its ideology on the remaining groups (Krastev, 2007). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2019) emphasize that populism is a phenomenon that conflicts with liberal currents, intermediary institutions of democracy, and forms of politics. They describe it as a non-pragmatic movement that emerges particularly during crises, with a focus on renewal and reform, promising to solve issues that clog the system and disrupt social, cultural, and economic dynamics (Doroshenko, 2018). Populism, they argue, is destined to disappear and lose power once the conditions that gave rise to it are resolved. When examining the rise of far-right parties and movements from this perspective, it is observed that the resurgence of the far-right has historically paralleled significant global crises and events that affect large populations, such as wars (Baumel, 2014). In this context, migration, which is closely related to these two concepts, emerges as one of the fundamental factors driving the rise of the far-right (Bale, 2003).

Table 2. A comparison of extreme Right and national-populist parties

	<i>Right Extremist Parties</i>	<i>National-Populist Parties</i>
System Position	Anti-System	Anti-Establishment Antietatism
Political Strategies (Politics)	Distinction From The System	Differentiation Within And From The System, Adaptation To The System
Form Of Ideology	Comprehensive Anti-Pluralism	Flexible, Anti-Pluralist Effects
Ideology (Policy)	Nationalist, Racist	Homogenous Will Of The People Against The Ones Above And The Ones From Outside
Polity-Vision	Dictatorship, Authoritarianism	Presidential Democracy, Debilitation Of Liberal Constitution
Form Of Organization	Authoritarian, Without Inner-Party Democracy	Top-Down Parties, Movement And Personal Antiparties, Small Inter-Party Democracy

Kaynak: Frölich-Steffen and Rensman, 2005, p.10

However, Mudde reminds us that classifications like those in Table 2 are only temporarily valid, as political parties and ideologies can evolve. Some parties that initially emerged as populist radical right have gradually shifted to become primarily conservative (Mudde, 2005). These indicators are important for our thesis in positioning the Zafer Party within the political spectrum. Some key themes of far-right politics or movements position the party. According to Mudde, Common characteristics, in various forms, include nationalism, xenophobia, an emphasis on law and order, welfare chauvinism, racism, anti-Semitism, external exclusion, internal uniformity, traditional values, opposition to the West, revisionist views, conspiracy theories, anti-globalization, anti-establishment populism, and charismatic leadership (Mudde, 2005).

Overall, the far-right is a complex and multifaceted political movement that encompasses a variety of groups, ideologies, and organizations, making its definition challenging (Edo and Giesing, 2020). It is often associated with nationalism, opposition to modern sociocultural changes, and the rejection of democratic principles in favor of authoritarian systems based on race, ethnicity, and religion (Gerrits, 2014). Despite its extreme values, modern far-right movements have adapted to democratic processes, seeking to change the status quo rather than dismantle the entire system. Populism, a key element of the far-right, divides society into "pure people" and "corrupt elites" and often emerges during times of crisis (Gold, 2020). The rise of far-right movements has historically paralleled global crises and significant events, with migration frequently identified as a fundamental factor driving this resurgence (Pisoiu and Ahmed, 2015). The far-right's appeal lies in its promise to protect national identity and cultural homogeneity in the face of perceived threats from external influences such as migration (Schumann et al., 2019).

When examining the recent rise of the far-right globally, it is evident that the 9/11 attacks have played a pivotal role, leading to a significant global surge in far-right movements. These events have particularly fostered increased nationalism, Islamophobia, and racism, which have triggered changes in societal behaviors and attitudes. Political parties have begun to view these shifts as opportunities, leading to the politicization of these elements and laying the groundwork for the rise of the far-right (Hıdır, 2018). In Europe, these movements have resonated significantly within society, to the extent that even left-wing parties have started to adopt and articulate certain far-right rhetoric. For example, in France's 2012 presidential elections, Sarkozy, a leader from the left, employed a campaign strategy with themes strikingly

similar to those of the far-right leader Le Pen, ultimately leading to his electoral victory (Atikkan, 2017).

The rise of the far-right, when considered within a theoretical framework, has been extensively studied, particularly regarding the supply and demand of far-right ideologies (Giebler and Regel, 2018). On the demand side, it has been observed that globalization and modernization have left certain groups economically and socially disadvantaged (Mudde, 2010). These groups, feeling deceived, oppressed, and victimized, are more likely to gravitate towards far-right ideologies. A significant concern among these individuals is the perceived neglect and disregard of their problems by the current governments (Ghosh, 2011). As a result, they are more inclined to believe in and support populist rhetoric. Economic issues, in particular, are one of the most critical factors fueling the rise of the far-right, as economic challenges tend to exacerbate social and other related problems, deepening existing crises (Karolewski and Benedikter, 2017). Migration is another phenomenon that has provided fertile ground for the rise of the far-right, especially in European countries, where the rise of the radical right and far-right has closely paralleled waves of migration (Kutter, 2014). On the supply side, political parties' attitudes and actions towards the far-right are significant. Political parties that can analyze societal expectations and develop rhetoric accordingly are able to respond to these groups and gain their votes (Rommel, 2017).

One of the most notable characteristics of the far-right is its pronounced increase during times of crisis, accompanied by a broadening of its voter base. In the context of Europe, migration is considered a significant crisis. Although Europe, with its developed economy, requires labor, uncontrolled migration that fails to integrate into society leads to social and economic problems, which, in turn, strengthens far-right movements (Cadwell, 2009).

In Europe, migration is the most critical trigger for the rise of the far-right. When the history of migration in Europe is examined, the number of immigrants, which was negligible in the 1950s and 1960s, exceeded 60 million by 2018 (EU, 2018). Historically, the 1990s were a period when the far-right became particularly prominent, and this rise has been attributed to the increasing rate of uncontrolled migration during those years. Before this period, far-right parties were not supported by the European public; however, over time, they gained enough power to become coalition partners. The vote shares of populist and far-right parties across Europe, which was around 6% in the early 2000s, had surpassed 20% by 2018 (Grindheim, 2019). Recent election results reflect this trend; in Germany, the far-right AfD party, founded in 2013, surpassed the 5% threshold in 2014 and achieved 12% of the vote in the 2017 elections, reaching

17% by the 2024 elections (Giebler and Regel, 2018; Decker, Ruhose and Adorf, 2024). A similar trend was observed in Italy, where the far-right bloc exceeded 50% of the vote in the 2018 elections and reached 62% in the 2024 elections. In Austria, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) became one of the most significant actors in national politics after forming a coalition with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in 2000. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom (PVV), established as the successor to Geert Wilders' one-man party in the House of Representatives in 2006, won nine seats in the general elections of the same year, becoming the fifth-largest party in parliament. In the 2010 general elections, the PVV secured 15.5% of the vote, making it the third-largest party, and in the 2017 elections, it gained 20 seats in parliament, becoming the second-largest party.

When examining the history and current state of the far-right in Türkiye, both similarities and differences with Europe emerge. While Islamophobia plays a significant role in the impact of migration on the rise of the far-right in Europe, in Türkiye, cultural and economic factors are more influential. Particularly following the Syrian civil war, the government's open-door policy, coupled with narratives of "religious brotherhood" and "host and guest," created an environment of acceptance towards migrants until the economic downturn and contraction in 2018. However, the currency crises of 2018 and the subsequent economic contraction revealed that these narratives were no longer accepted by society, and a negative perception of refugees began to dominate (İçduygu and Aksel, 2022). The migrant flow seen in Türkiye over the past decade is unprecedented in the history of the Turkish Republic. For instance, while the number of Bulgarian immigrants and Turkish Bulgarians who migrated to Türkiye in 1989 was approximately 250,000, the number of Syrian immigrants alone is reported to be over 3 million (İçduygu and Aksel, 2022). The sheer number of migrants Türkiye has faced over the past decade, coupled with the uncertainty surrounding migration policies, the lack of a repatriation plan, and the negative impact of migrants on the economy, society, culture, and social life, has led to a significant societal impact and the emergence of anti-migrant sentiment, which has contributed to the rise of far-right rhetoric in Türkiye (Balta, Elçi and Sert, 2022).

Anti-migrant sentiment in Türkiye emerges from a combination of economic crises and sociocultural factors such as identity and nationalism. A significant role is played by the identity conflict that arises from the inability of Syrian migrants to integrate and the continuation of their identities within Türkiye (Karakaya, 2022). In this context, the rise of xenophobia and far-right approaches in Türkiye stems from the cultural and economic conflict between the "we,"

who are seen as the true owners of the country with local identity and culture and citizenship status, and the "others" and "foreigners," who are defined as migrants. In contemporary Türkiye, migrants are increasingly viewed not only as economic competitors but also as external elements that threaten the national values that create a sense of belonging within society and individuals. The growing reaction against migrants and the rise of xenophobia indicate that identity politics have become influential in this process. For example, a study conducted by Kaldık (2021) in Bingöl found that, in addition to economic factors, issues of security and identity played a significant role in the emergence of anti-migrant tendencies towards Syrians. Over time, identity issues have begun to replace the initial socio-economic justifications for opposition to migrants, particularly Syrians. Although religious proximity and the government's moderate approach towards migrants have been able to contain anti-migrant sentiment to some extent, the influence of nationalist rhetoric has led to the spread of reactive ideas and attitudes at the societal level (Tepe, 2019).

As a summary, this section explored the rise of far-right movements globally and in Türkiye, highlighting the significant role of events such as the 9/11 attacks in fueling nationalism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia. In Europe, this trend has been particularly pronounced, with far-right ideologies gaining traction and even influencing traditionally left-wing parties. Also, the rise of the far-right is closely linked to socio-economic factors, such as the perceived neglect of disadvantaged groups and the impact of uncontrolled migration. In Türkiye, the increase in anti-migrant sentiment is driven by both economic crises and cultural identity conflicts, particularly in response to the Syrian refugee crisis. This has led to a broader societal shift towards xenophobia and far-right rhetoric, mirroring trends seen in Europe. Overall, the rise of the far-right reflects deep societal anxieties about cultural and economic stability, often exacerbated by crises and migration. These movements capitalize on fears of losing national identity and cultural homogeneity, framing themselves as protectors of these values. In Türkiye, the challenges of integrating a large influx of Syrian refugees have intensified these concerns, leading to a growing alignment with far-right ideologies. This trend underscores the complex interplay between economic conditions, cultural identity, and political rhetoric in shaping public attitudes and political landscapes.

In summary, when the literature is examined a broad perspective on the Zafer Party's (ZP) impact, emphasizing its role in reshaping political and social discourse in Türkiye. The ZP has heightened the visibility of far-right tendencies within the public sphere, with studies noting that the party's rhetoric has catalyzed a conservative turn among mainstream parties,

influencing their policies on immigration. Scholars like Rydgren and Van der Meiden (2019) observe that the ZP's influence aligns with the rise of similar far-right and anti-immigrant movements across Europe, indicating a shift in Türkiye's political landscape toward more nationalistic and exclusionary ideologies. Additionally, Balta, Elçi, and Sert (2023) highlight that economic pressures have made Turkish voters increasingly susceptible to nationalist and protectionist sentiments. The literature suggests that the ZP, through its emphasis on identity and cultural protectionism, has intensified a nationalist awareness among voters, shaping attitudes toward immigration even if this shift doesn't directly translate into electoral gains for the party. Moreover, the ZP's success in bringing the immigration issue to national prominence is a recurrent theme in the literature. Research indicates that previously underreported by the media, immigration has now become a central topic in Turkish politics, largely due to the ZP's focus. Studies by Sert, Daniş, and Sevinin (2023) argue that this focus has had a powerful effect on media framing, amplifying nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric and contributing to broader shifts in public perception regarding national identity. This synthesis of the literature demonstrates that the ZP has, directly or indirectly, altered the contours of political discourse in Türkiye, amplifying nationalist and exclusionary sentiments that have since been absorbed into the agendas of mainstream parties and the media alike.

3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section of the study, the analytical framework of the study was presented through the theoretical perspectives and methodological approach. As for the theoretical perspectives, this study focuses on the topic of populism theory, nationalism studies, and migration. Regarding populism this thesis utilizes populism theory to examine how the ZP crafts its messages to resonate with the voters, positioning itself against the political rivals. This approach helps in understanding the rhetorical strategies that frame the party's appeal to nativist sentiments and anti-immigrant rhetoric. As for the nationalism side, this thesis focuses on nationalism to explore the ZP's emphasis on Turkish identity and sovereignty. This perspective is crucial for analyzing how the party leverages historical narratives and cultural symbols to foster a collective national identity among its supporters. Lastly, regarding the migration issue, this thesis underlines the negative effects of migration on society by ZP's actions. This helps in understanding the broader demographic and socio-economic factors that the party uses to justify its policy positions.

As for the methodological approach two different qualitative research methods were used in this thesis. The primary methodology for data analysis is thematic analysis, which is utilized to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. This method is particularly suited for this study as it allows for a flexible and rich exploration of qualitative data, reflecting the complexities of political discourse. Complementary to thematic analysis, content analysis is employed to quantify and map out the frequency and nature of specific themes related to nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments across different media platforms and party documents.

3.1 Research Methodology

A descriptive and exploratory research design is implemented in this study. The descriptive aspect will focus on delineating the key characteristics and attributes of the Zafer Party, while the analytical dimension aims to scrutinize the relationships between the party's strategies, ideologies, discourses, and their resonance within the context of Turkish nationalism.

3.1.1. Research Design

The design of this study is based on thematic analysis, as the qualitative research techniques. In general, qualitative research techniques, by their nature, are analytical methods that structure traditional research methods in social, economic, and administrative sciences, relying on interpretative and inductive assumptions and theories (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). So, qualitative analysis is a research method that deeply examines the meaning and content of qualitative data, aiming to interpret and describe the data by extracting insights (Glesne, 2013).

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Guest, MacQueen and Namey (), is an inductive method well-suited for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. This method is particularly fitting for the data sources of this study-party manifestos, newspaper articles, and Youtube recordings of electional rallies- since these varied and rich text provide a broad spectrum of information. The flexibility of thematic analysis, which allows for systematic coding and themes identification, aligns with the exploratory nature of this study, making it ideal for extracting key insights from large, unstructured data sets. Thematic analysis follows a clear, iterative process that begins with familiarization with the data, followed by generating initial codes, and culminates in the identification of central themes (Guest, MacQueen and Namey). This approach not only enables a deep understanding of the content but also accommodates the complex, multi-layered nature of the sources used in this study, ensuring that meaningful patterns and themes emerge through rigorous analysis.

Though content analysis has historical roots in hermeneutic traditions (e.g., biblical interpretations), its development is often associated with interpretative methods introduced by Freud. Regardless of the approach, content analysis remains rooted in a foundational framework. David and Christopher emphasize that media documents serve as rich sources for qualitative research, and incorporating content analysis of such sources adds depth and validity to research findings (David & Christopher, 2015). The research design of this thesis incorporates both qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a systematic and objective research method used to examine and categorize written or spoken materials according to specific themes, patterns, or meanings (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Qualitative descriptive methodologies including descriptive phenomenology, content analysis, and thematic analysis are well-suited for research that aims to maintain a manageable level of interpretive complexity, in contrast to grounded theory and hermeneutic

phenomenology, which require more intricate interpretive engagement (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

This first stage involves identifying and categorizing themes to gain insights into the underlying content. In this stage of the research design manifesto, and youtube rally recordings are the main source thesis.

On the other hand, quantitative content analysis enables the systematic quantification of certain elements across larger volumes of text, such as newspaper articles. This includes the second step of the design. By analyzing newspapers based on quantitative content analysis, this study aims to empirically capture trends, patterns, and shifts over time in media representation, especially, contributing to a broader understanding of public discourse (Neuendorf, 2017). Moreover, quantitative content analysis is mainly used for newspapers of *Cumhuriyet* and *Sabah* to categorize the themes. Through this method, underlying messages, trends, and relationships within sources are identified and examined in detail.

The subject, objectives, and theoretical framework of the study were taken into consideration, and the ZP's founding manifesto was first examined to accurately determine the research themes. The thematic analysis aimed at identifying the themes was conducted according to the following steps. These are the crucial steps to implement themes in the study (Greg S. Guest, 2012).

1. Familiarization with Data: Immersing in the data through repeated reading to understand the depth and context. This step is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the material.

Start by thoroughly reading the entire manifesto multiple times. This process involves not just reading the text but also reflecting on its context, tone, and key messages. It's crucial to understand the overarching themes and the specific concerns the manifesto addresses. According to the findings, the main key points of the manifesto were presented below:

Table 2. Familiarization with Data

Themes	Explanations
Focus on Migration as a Central Issue	Emphasis on migration and refugee-related policies as a core political issue.
Criticism of Current Political Leadership	Discontent with the current leadership, highlighting governance shortcomings.
Emphasis on National Identity and Sovereignty	Strong focus on national identity and sovereignty, reinforcing the state's territorial integrity.
Economic Protectionism	Efforts to safeguard domestic industries and enhance economic self-sufficiency.
Populist and Nationalist Rhetoric	Use of populist discourse and nationalist rhetoric to mobilize mass support.
Historical and Cultural References	Invocation of historical narratives and cultural values to reinforce political legitimacy.
Security and Defense Concerns	Prioritization of national security and military defense in political discourse and policy.

1. Emphasis on National Identity and Sovereignty:

The manifesto strongly emphasizes the protection of Turkish national identity and sovereignty. This is evident in the frequent references to historical figures, national symbols, and the idea of defending the nation against perceived external and internal threats. The party positions itself as the protector of Turkish values and sovereignty.

2. Focus on Migration as a Central Issue:

Migration, particularly the presence of Syrian refugees and other immigrants, is portrayed as a significant threat to national stability. The manifesto repeatedly highlights concerns about the economic, social, and security impacts of migration, framing it as a form of "strategic invasion" that undermines Turkish society.

3. Criticism of Current Political Leadership:

There is a strong critique of the current political leadership, particularly the ruling AKP and other opposition parties. The manifesto accuses them of failing to protect the nation and compromising on issues of national importance. This criticism is coupled with a call for a return to more traditional, nationalist values.

4. Populist and Nationalist Rhetoric:

The manifesto employs populist rhetoric, positioning the party as the true representative of the "real" Turkish people against corrupt elites and external influences. The language used is often aggressive and assertive, designed to resonate with those who feel disenfranchised or threatened by current policies.

5. Historical and Cultural References:

The document frequently references Turkish history, particularly the struggles and victories that have shaped the nation. These references are used to draw parallels between past conflicts and current challenges, reinforcing the party's narrative of continuity and defense of the Turkish state.

6. Security and Defense Concerns:

National security is a major theme, with the manifesto advocating for strong defense policies and measures to protect against both external threats (e.g., migration) and internal issues (e.g., economic instability, political corruption).

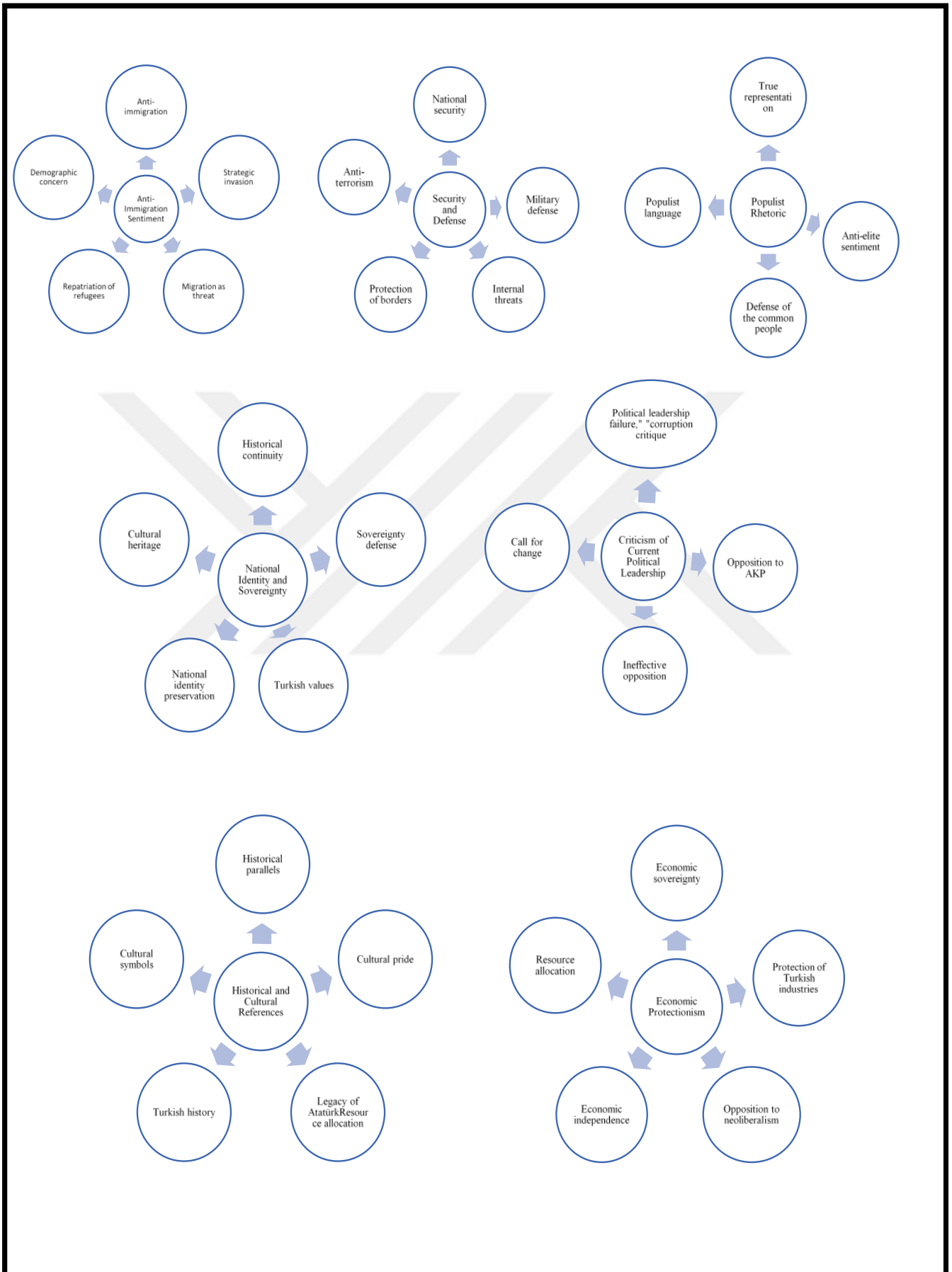
7. Economic Protectionism:

Economic issues are also prominent, with the manifesto advocating for policies that prioritize Turkish citizens and industries. There is a clear opposition to neoliberal economic policies and a call for economic sovereignty.

Overall, these insights suggest that the manifesto is structured around a few core themes: national identity, anti-immigration sentiment, criticism of the current political system. These themes are articulated through a populist and nationalist lens, with an emphasis on historical continuity and cultural preservation. This understanding will guide the next steps in the thematic analysis, particularly in generating initial codes and identifying broader themes.

2. Generating Initial Codes was the second step for the identifying the themes for the research. This step includes systematically identifying and coding meaningful features of the data. Codes are the building blocks for themes and represent the most basic segment of the raw data. During the "Generating Initial Codes" stage, the goal is to systematically identify and code meaningful features of ZP manifesto. This involves breaking down the text into smaller, more manageable pieces (codes) that capture the essential ideas or patterns within the data. Some key insights and potential codes that could be developed from the manifesto were presented below:

Figures 4. Generating Initial Codes



As for the National Identity and Sovereignty theme the codes generated were "National identity preservation," "sovereignty defense," "historical continuity," "Turkish values," "cultural heritage." These codes capture the manifesto's focus on maintaining and defending Turkish national identity and sovereignty against perceived internal and external threats.

As for the Anti-Immigration Sentiment, codes generated were "Anti-immigration," "strategic invasion," "migration as threat," "repatriation of refugees," "demographic concern." And these codes reflect the manifesto's strong stance against immigration, particularly the presence of Syrian refugees and other immigrants, which are framed as existential threats to the Turkish nation.

As for the Criticism of Current Political Leadership codes generated were: "Political leadership failure," "corruption critique," "opposition to AKP," "ineffective opposition," "call for change." These codes highlight the manifesto's critique of the ruling AKP and other political parties, portraying them as ineffective or complicit in the erosion of national values and security.

As for the Populist Rhetoric codes generated were "True representation," "anti-elite sentiment," "people vs. establishment," "defense of the common people," "populist language." These codes capture the manifesto's use of populist rhetoric, positioning the ZP as the true representative of the Turkish people against corrupt elites and foreign influences.

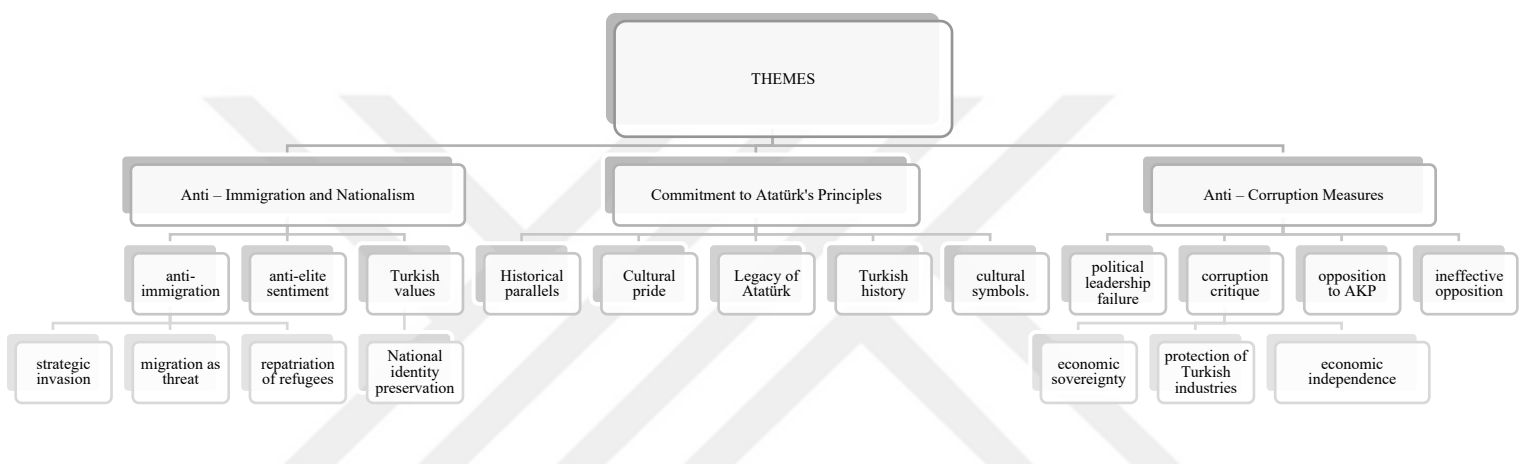
As for the Security and Defense statements the codes generated were "National security," "military defense," "internal threats," "protection of borders," "anti-terrorism." These codes reflect the manifesto's emphasis on national security and defense, advocating for strong measures to protect the country from both internal and external threats.

As for the Economic Protectionism codes generated were "Economic sovereignty," "protection of Turkish industries," "opposition to neoliberalism," "economic independence," "resource allocation." These codes focus on the manifesto's economic policies, which prioritize protecting Turkish industries and resources from external influence and ensuring economic independence.

Lastly for the Historical and Cultural References statements the codes generated were; "Historical parallels," "cultural pride," "legacy of Atatürk," "Turkish history," "cultural symbols." These codes capture the frequent references to Turkish history and culture, which are used to reinforce the party's narrative and connect past struggles to current challenges.

3. *Searching for Themes* includes grouping codes into broader themes that capture key aspects of the data. In this context codes were grouped into three themes; Anti-Immigration and Nationalism, Commitment to Atatürk's Principles and Anti-Corruption Measures.

Figure 5. Group of Themes



3.1.1.1 Theme 1: Anti – Immigration and Nationalism

The ZP's ideology is characterized by its staunch nationalism, anti-immigration stance, and alignment with the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This ideology resonates with a segment of the Turkish population that feels marginalized by the mainstream political discourse. The party's rhetoric and policies reflect a blend of radical right principles, emphasizing national sovereignty, cultural preservation, and stringent immigration controls. One of the core tenets of the ZP is its strong opposition to immigration, particularly in the context of the AKP's policies. The party views the influx of refugees and migrants as a demographic threat, accusing the ruling party of strategic demographic engineering. This narrative taps into fears and anxieties within certain segments of the Turkish population, positioning the Zafer Party as a defender of Turkish identity and sovereignty (Akçay and Deniz, 2022).

This theme encapsulates the ZP strong stance against immigration, particularly focusing on the perceived threats that migration poses to national identity, security, and social cohesion. The manifesto repeatedly emphasizes the need to preserve Turkish national sovereignty and cultural heritage in the face of what is described as a strategic invasion by migrants, particularly from Syria. This narrative is closely tied to a broader nationalist ideology that seeks to protect and prioritize the interests of Turkish citizens above all else. The codes grouped under this theme include "anti-immigration," "strategic invasion," "migration as a threat," "repatriation of refugees," and "demographic concern," which highlight the party's portrayal of migration as a significant challenge to Türkiye's stability and identity. Additionally, codes like "national identity preservation," "sovereignty defense," and "Turkish values" emphasize the party's commitment to defending the nation's cultural and historical legacy against external influences. This theme also incorporates elements of populist rhetoric, captured in codes such as "true representation," "anti-elite sentiment," and "people vs. establishment," which the party uses to position itself as the defender of the Turkish people against both external threats and a political establishment that it views as having failed to protect the nation. The manifesto's language under this theme is assertive and combative, designed to resonate with voters who feel that their way of life is under threat and who seek a political force that will take decisive action to safeguard their national identity. Overall the "Anti-Immigration and Nationalism" theme reflects a key aspect of the ZP's ground where strong nationalist sentiment is intertwined with a firm opposition to immigration, framing these issues as central to the party's political identity and appeal.

3.1.1.2 Theme 2 - Commitment to Atatürk's Principles

Another central aspect of the ZP's ideology is its commitment to Atatürk's principles. The party seeks to align itself with the foundational values of the Turkish Republic, advocating for a secular, unitary state. This alignment with Atatürk's legacy serves to differentiate the Zafer Party from other nationalist movements, emphasizing a historical continuity with Türkiye's early republican ideals (Balta, Elçi, and Sert, 2023).

This theme reflects the ZP's commitment to the principles and legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his principles. The manifesto frequently references Atatürk's ideals as a guiding force for the party's vision and policies, emphasizing the importance of upholding his vision for a strong, independent, and secular Türkiye. The codes grouped under this theme include "historical parallels," "cultural pride," "legacy of Atatürk," "Turkish history," and "cultural

symbols." These codes highlight the party's use of historical references and cultural symbols associated with Atatürk to reinforce its political narrative. The manifesto often draws parallels between contemporary challenges and the struggles faced by Atatürk, framing the party's mission as a continuation of his efforts to protect and strengthen the Turkish nation. This theme also highlights the party's dedication to preserving the cultural and historical legacy that Atatürk established, particularly in the face of perceived threats from both internal and external forces. The manifesto emphasizes the need to protect the secular, nationalist, and modernist values that Atatürk championed, positioning the party as the true defender of his legacy. In essence, the "Commitment to Atatürk's Principles" theme represents a core aspect of the ZP's identity, where parallel to Atatürk's ideals is presented as both a moral duty and a strategic necessity for the nation's future. The party uses this theme to connect with voters who revere Atatürk's legacy and who seek a political force committed to maintaining his vision for Türkiye.

3.1.1.3 Theme 3 – Anti – Corruption Measures

The ZP also places a significant emphasis on anti-corruption measures. Özdağ has been vocal about the need to address corruption within Turkish politics, criticizing both the ruling party and the opposition for failing to tackle this issue effectively. This anti-corruption stance is a key component of the party's platform, aimed at appealing to voters disillusioned with the perceived corruption and cronyism within the political establishment (Elçi, 2022).

This theme focuses on the ZP's strong commitment to combating corruption within the political and economic systems of Türkiye. The manifesto emphasizes the party's determination to address and eliminate the pervasive corruption that it claims has weakened the nation's institutions and undermined public trust in the government. The party positions itself as a reformist force, seeking to restore integrity and accountability in governance. The codes grouped under this theme include "political leadership failure," "corruption critique," "opposition to AKP," and "ineffective opposition," which reflect the party's harsh criticism of the current political establishment. The manifesto accuses both the ruling AKP and other opposition parties of failing to address corruption effectively, portraying them as complicit in a system that prioritizes personal and elite interests over those of the people. Additionally, the theme incorporates codes like "economic sovereignty," "protection of Turkish industries," and "economic independence," highlighting the party's focus on economic nationalism as a way to prevent corruption and ensure that Türkiye's wealth benefits its citizens. The manifesto advocates for policies that protect Turkish industries from foreign exploitation and reduce the

influence of corrupt practices in economic decision-making. Through this theme, the ZP presents itself as a solution for a clean governance and economic integrity, appealing to voters who are frustrated with the current state of corruption in Türkiye. The party's anti-corruption stance is linked to its broader nationalist and populist rhetoric, positioning itself as the true representative of the people's interests against a corrupt elite. As a result, the "Anti-Corruption Measures" theme captures the Zafer Partisi's focus on rooting out corruption and restoring transparency and accountability in both the political and economic spheres. This theme is central to the party's identity as a reformist force committed to revitalizing Türkiye's governance and economy.

In summary, within the framework of the research's aims and objectives, the themes of Anti-Immigration and Nationalism, Commitment to Atatürk's Principles, and Anti-Corruption Measures have been identified, and the qualitative analyses to be conducted will be centered around these themes.

3.1.2. Data Sources

The data for the study has been gathered from three different sources: party election declarations, newspapers, and YouTube rally recordings.

Party elections declarations source were represents the detailed analysis of official party election declarations, manifestos, and policy statements will be performed to understand the stated ideologies, strategies, and objectives of the Zafer Party. These documents provide direct insights into the party's formal positions and proposed policies.

Examination of newspaper coverage and editorials will be undertaken to comprehend the media's portrayal and coverage of the ZP its campaign strategies, and its alignment with nationalist sentiments. In order to gathering data from the newspaper the news that published between 01.01. 2023 and 13.05. 2023 which is the election period according to the Supreme Election Council¹ on Sabah and Cumhuriyet newspaper were analyzed. Sabah is a publication that closely aligned with the ruling party, while Cumhuriyet is aligned with the opposition, particularly with the CHP (Liazos, 2023). Current owner of the Sabah newspaper the Kalyon Group is one of the biggest business group in Türkiye which belongs to the Hasan and Cemal Kalyoncu. Kalyon Group is recognized as one of Türkiye's largest construction firms, having undertaken major projects such as the construction of the Metrobus line and the Taksim

¹ The General Election Date in 2023 retrieved from, <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/14Mayis2023/2023-99-secim-takvimi.pdf>

Pedestrianization Project, and being part of the consortium that won the bid for Istanbul's New Airport. The group is frequently involved in public tenders and large-scale build-operate-transfer projects, positioning it closely with the AKP. On December 20, 2013, the group expanded into the media sector by acquiring Turkuvaz Media Group from Çalık Holding. When examining Cumhuriyet newspaper's close affiliation with the CHP, it is notable that the current owner, on behalf of the Cumhuriyet Foundation, is Alev Coşkun². Alev Coşkun served as the Minister of Tourism and Promotion in the 42nd Government of Türkiye (1978-1979) and was a CHP member of parliament during the 15th and 16th terms of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Cumhuriyet newspaper summarizes its editorial mission with the statement, "The newspaper's core policy is ATATÜRK's enlightenment revolutions," emphasizing its commitment to Atatürkist principles. By examining these two newspapers, the study aims to analyze and evaluate the perspectives of two media outlets that represent different positions within the Turkish political landscape regarding ZP.

Scrutiny of YouTube rally recordings through these processes which is defined as rally speech and the basic criteria for selecting the videos examined within the scope of the research are that the video should be 30 minutes or longer and recorded as a result of interaction with the masses in a digital or physical environment. In this context, four of the videos examined are conferences with broad participation, one is a conversation with a high number of viewers in a digital environment, and the other is an event where interaction is established with many voters within the scope of election campaigns. These recordings are crucial for assessing the party's communication strategies and how they engage with their audience during rallies.

3.1.3 Research Limitations

Limitations are an important part of any study, and this thesis is no exception. First, as this is a specific case study focusing on a single party, measuring voter behavior is not the main focus of the study. This is important because, although the findings place the party within the far-right spectrum, many voters may perceive it differently. Additionally, during the 2023 general elections, the Zafer Party joined the ATA alliance for the first round but diverged in the second round, where Ümit Özdağ visibly differed from the alliance leader, Sinan Oğan, regarding party endorsements. Consequently, news coverage related to the Zafer Party by outlets such as Sabah became increasingly negative in tone during the second round. Therefore,

² Media Ownership Monitor Türkiye, retrieved from, <https://Türkiye.mom-rsf.org/tr/medya-sahipleri/sahislar/>

news articles published between May 14, 2023, and May 28, 2023, have been excluded from this study. Secondly, an important limitation involves the YouTube rally recordings. These videos were selected based on their content, theme, and, notably, their length. Therefore, this thesis excludes videos shorter than thirty minutes, which may contain significant messages and dialogues. Thirdly, inner-party democracy and party policies are additional components of the Zafer Party. However, since I am not a member of the Zafer Party and no data on this topic has been made publicly available, I was unable to access these details. Finally, due to time constraints and, more importantly, for the sake of efficiency, I was unable to review all newspapers and conduct a thematic analysis across them. This is another limitation of the thesis.



4. Zafer Party and Its Effects on the Turkish Politics

In this section, the rise of the ZP, its success, its impact on Turkish politics, and the underlying reasons behind its achievements and influence are examined from a broad perspective. The ZP, established by Ümit Özdağ on August 26, 2021, is a nationalist, anti-immigration, and domestically-focused far-right political entity. The party's particularly radical stance towards immigrants, especially Syrians, distances it from mainstream and center-right politics, positioning it within the far-right spectrum and drawing parallels with similar parties in Europe (Ceylan, 2021). The ZP adopts a nationalist and ultra-nationalist posture, combining its anti-immigration rhetoric with nationalist ideals, resulting in a political approach that criticizes both the ruling and opposition parties, advocating a stance against refugees and immigrants (Erturun, 2022). An analysis of the party's program reveals significant criticism of traditional political practices in Türkiye. These criticisms suggest that the primary goal of political actors, perceived to be in collaboration with imperialist forces, is to weaken and divide Türkiye through what is termed "strategic migration engineering." In response, the ZP proposes that, as a priority, all immigrants should be repatriated, either voluntarily or involuntarily, alongside measures to secure borders and combat corruption, while implementing an economic reform agenda (Özdemir, 2023).

In the introductory section of its program, under the title "The Current State of Türkiye," the ZP examines the country's economic, social, and political conditions, emphasizing that Türkiye is engulfed in a multi-dimensional crisis. This crisis is described as having evolved into a chronic state of national, economic, and refugee crises, all occurring simultaneously (Zafer Partisi, 2021). The party identifies the ruling AKP as the primary cause of these crises, describing Türkiye's current situation as one where "the economy has lost its luster, people no longer trust each other or the state, and the public institutions are mistrusted. The country is unstable, lurching from one crisis to another, incapable of solving its problems or managing natural disasters, with educated citizens and accumulated capital seeking opportunities to flee the country" (Zafer Partisi, 2021).

According to the ZP, the policies of the ruling party have significantly regressed Türkiye in almost every field. While the world is forming new trade and political alliances, experiencing technological transformations driven by artificial intelligence and autonomous technologies, and reshaping economies, Türkiye is still grappling with rudimentary issues and missing out on

these global advancements (Zafer Partisi, 2021). The party criticizes the Presidential Government System as a “one-man rule,” labeling it corrupt, decayed, inefficient, slow, and plagued by multiple crises, unable to solve the nation’s problems. Additionally, the Victory Party points to the opposition's failure to effectively challenge the ruling party, arguing that the opposition has been passive, inadequate, and has failed to produce lasting, national solutions (Zafer Partisi, 2021).

The ZP also has presented a series of proposed solutions in its party program, emphasizing that overcoming the current multifaceted crisis environment requires the adoption of specific steps and fundamental principles. Within this framework, it is stated that addressing crises and challenges necessitates prioritizing solutions rooted in the "founding values and spirit of the Republic" (Zafer Partisi, 2021). The party advocates for the implementation of policies based on reason and science as another essential requirement for overcoming the crises. Furthermore, the ZP underscores the importance of bold and decisive actions by political and bureaucratic cadres in navigating the crisis environment. The most critical element identified by the party for overcoming the crisis is the reestablishment of national sovereignty, a core principle of the Republic's founding. The party argues that escaping the "spiral of crises" will be possible only when the will of the people is fully represented in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Consequently, the ZP asserts that to resolve these multifaceted crises and address structural issues, it is necessary for a party that has forged an alliance with the people, such as the ZP, to come to power (Zafer Partisi, 2021). Embracing a vision centered on freedom, social justice, and production, the ZP identifies core values such as fostering collective wisdom, transparency, freedom of thought, lifelong learning, continuous development, honesty, sincerity, responsibility, loyalty to the state, compassion for the nation, and respect for humanity as its foundational principles (Zafer Partisi, 2021).

Particularly considering the economic challenges faced by Türkiye, as well as the rise of far-right movements in both Europe and Türkiye and the ongoing geopolitical developments discussed in previous sections of this study, it is evident that Turkish politics has entered a period of transformation and change. The AKP, which has held power for 20 years, has begun to lose its grip, while the main opposition party, CHP, has started to gain strength. Amid these developments, the rise of the ZP represents a significant shift in Türkiye's political dynamics. Established by Ümit Özdağ, the party has tapped into nationalist and anti-immigration sentiments, gaining traction among voters disillusioned with the ruling AKP's policies. The ZP’s focus on national sovereignty, strict immigration control, and economic equality resonates

with a segment of the population that feels neglected by the current administration. The ZP's ascent reflects broader global trends where populist movements have gained momentum by addressing issues of national identity and economic discontent. The party's emphasis on repatriating Syrian refugees and restoring secular and nationalist values has struck a chord with many voters, illustrating the shifting priorities within Turkish society. This political evolution highlights the dynamic and often volatile nature of Turkish politics. As the nation continues to navigate these changes, the legacy of the AKP's governance and the emerging influence of the ZP will play crucial roles in shaping Türkiye's future political and socio-economic landscape.

The ZP was founded by Ümit Özdağ, who served as deputy chairman of both the MHP and the İYİ Party and has a very strong nationalist background. The party distinguishes itself from other political parties by making the refugee crisis, which it sees as Türkiye's most urgent problem, its main policy (Ceylan, 2021). While the roots of parties positioned based on anti-refugee stance in the West date back quite a long time, the ZP represents a first in Turkish political life by being founded only three years ago and has gained significant influence in Turkish politics in such a short time, reaching 2.23% of the vote in the 2023 elections and influencing the discourse and actions of other parties. Özdağ claims that there is a goal to establish a Kurdistan state consisting of parts of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Türkiye, and argues that this goal is being achieved through refugees with the thesis that "they are being bombed to make them come." ³ Institutionally, the Zafer Party defines itself with Turkish nationalism. In the party program, he expressed his ideological mission as "Turkish Nationalism in line with Atatürk, his love for his nation, and in his political activities, he defines his Nationalism as the political expression of the idea of making the Republic of Türkiye an independent, lawful, strong state and for its nation to live in prosperity" (Zafer Partisi, 2021). While it is stated in the party program that Türkiye is the country that hosts the most refugees in the world, it is emphasized that this puts pressure on Türkiye economically and threatens its demographic structure and Turkish identity. The program also states that the population balance will change in favor of refugees in 25 years and that this situation will be against the Turkish nation, thus pointing to the danger of civil war. It is claimed that the ruling party is knowingly deepening this problem, while it is stated that the opposition parties are carried away by romantic dreams and console themselves with humanist literature (Zafer Partisi, 2021).

³ İYİ Partili Ümit Özdağ: İnsanlar bombalandıkları için Türkiye'ye kaçmıyor, Türkiye'ye kaçmaları için bombalanıyorlar (People are not fleeing to Türkiye because they are being bombed; they are being bombed so that they flee to Türkiye.), retrieved from <https://www.indyturk.com/node/249321/siyaset/iyi-partili-umit-ozdag-insanlar-bombalandiklari-icin-turkiyeye-kaçmıyor#.X24NM7WqRf4.twitter>

The ZP's ideology is rooted in a form of nationalism that emphasizes the protection of Turkish identity and sovereignty. This ideology resonates with segments of the population who feel marginalized by globalization and the perceived erosion of national culture. The party's platform includes stringent immigration policies, economic protectionism, and a strong stance on national security, reflecting its nationalist orientation (Zafer Partisi, 2021). By analyzing the ideological underpinnings of the ZP, we can observe how it aligns with broader currents of Turkish nationalism. The party's rhetoric and policy proposals reflect concerns about cultural preservation, economic sovereignty, and national security. By tapping into these sentiments, the ZP has managed to carve out a significant political space, appealing to voters who feel disconnected from the mainstream political discourse and seek a more assertive stance on national issues. The ZP's emphasis on nationalism can be understood within the broader context of Turkish political history. The party's focus on protecting national identity and sovereignty reflects a continuation of the nationalist ideology that has shaped Turkish politics since the early Republican period. This form of nationalism is characterized by a strong sense of national pride and a commitment to preserving the cultural and political integrity of the Turkish state.

When the founding manifesto of the ZP is examined to understand its ideology and institutional structure, almost a quarter of the 2021 founding manifesto touches on Syrians, immigrants, and their negative effects on the country, while most of the economic, social, and political problems experienced in Türkiye are based on these elements (Zafer Partisi, 2021). On the other hand, the ZP party program also mentions Syrians and irregular immigrants extensively. It is stated that these immigrants, who are not being fought against, are disrupting the demographic structure of the country, affecting the distribution of resources in an unbalanced and unfair manner, and considering the rate of increase in their population, they will become the majority in some regions of the country in a few generations (Zafer Partisi, 2021). On the other hand, ZP's program is seen to develop a policy on immigrants, especially Syrians, based on arguments such as the urgent deportation of Syrians and other foreigners, that Afghans and Syrians have brought new diseases to the country, that they have negatively affected the current health and education system, that they have caused unemployment problems and that they have exposed Turkish youth to the danger of drugs (Zafer Partisi, 2021). The party has been trying to keep these anti-immigrant and anti-Syrian rhetoric, which are included in its founding manifesto and program, on the agenda at the leadership level since its establishment, and as a result of this effort, the ZP managed to receive 2.23% of the votes in

the 2023 General Elections, the first election it participated in, despite only two years having passed since its establishment (Supreme Election Board, 2023: 31).

When the communication strategy of the ZP was examined, it was seen that discourses about immigrants and their effects are heavily emphasized. The party tends to support its claims with various statistics and data by frequently bringing up the economic burden that immigrants bring to the country. Although official data show that there are 3.27 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye as of 2023 (UNHCR, 2023), the party expresses this figure as varying between 8 and 13 million and claims that undocumented immigrants are also included in this number. When the social media posts of the ZP and its leader Ümit Özdağ are examined, it is understood that the party uses a language that emphasizes its anti-immigrant ideology and excludes Syrian refugees. In this process, it is seen that various methods such as burden emphasis, judgmental language, comparisons, classifications, use of metaphors, number manipulations, national pride, creating alternative realities, dramatization, explanation with examples, generalization, defense based on probabilities and populist discourses are used in the party discourses. In this context, the ZP provides a striking example of the instrumentalization of Syrian refugees in politics in Türkiye. The party is notable for demonstrating that the migration issue is not only an administrative problem but also an important factor shaping the competition between political parties (Akman, 2020). When the Zafer Party's social media discourses on Syrian refugees are examined, it is noticed that refugees are frequently marginalized with provocative expressions and described with negative characteristics. The party shapes its discourse on Syrian refugees around three main themes. First, the claim that Syrian refugees pose an economic threat to Türkiye stands out. The party argues that refugees pose an economic burden to Türkiye by emphasizing the state's spending on Syrian refugees, the unemployment rate in the country, the decrease in workers' wages and rent increases with the arrival of refugees. The second theme is the claim that Syrian refugees are a threat to Türkiye's public safety and national security. The party positions refugees as a security risk, claiming that Syrians are frequently involved in crime, disrupt public order, endanger people's lives and property, enter the country illegally, and include people with terrorist ties. The third theme is that Syrian refugees pose a social and cultural threat to Türkiye. The party describes the increasing population of refugees as a demographic threat and argues that if they remain permanent, Turkish citizens will eventually become a minority. It also defends the view that the rapid population growth of refugees will damage Turkish culture and that Syrians who do not choose

to fight should not be granted citizenship, thus reinforcing the perception of Syrian refugees as a social and cultural threat.

Overall, the rise of the ZP reflects a significant shift in Türkiye's political landscape, characterized by the increasing influence of far-right ideologies, particularly in response to the nation's economic difficulties and social anxieties fueled by the immigrants. Founded by Ümit Özdağ in 2021, the ZP has rapidly distinguished itself through its nationalist and anti-immigration stance, focusing heavily on the perceived threats posed by Syrian refugees and other immigrants. This focus has resonated with segments of the Turkish population who feel disenfranchised by the current administration and anxious about the nation's future. The ZP's rhetoric, which emphasizes economic threats, public safety concerns, and cultural preservation, aligns with broader far-right movements across Europe that have similarly capitalized on fears of immigration and national identity loss. Despite being a relatively new party, the ZP's success in the 2023 elections, where it garnered 2.23% of the vote, underscores its growing influence and the potential for further shifts in Türkiye's political dynamics. This rise illustrates the broader trend of populist and nationalist movements gaining traction in response to global and domestic challenges, and highlights the ZP's role in shaping the future direction of Turkish politics by pushing the discourse towards more exclusionary and protectionist policies.

2.3.1. Zafer Party's Significance in Reshaping Turkish Politics

ZP, led by Ümit Özdağ, has emerged as a significant force in Turkish politics, particularly influencing the discourse around immigration and nationalism. Established in 2021, the party quickly gained attention for its hardline stance on immigration and its commitment to Turkish nationalism. The 2023 presidential election highlighted the ZP's growing influence, as it managed to shape the political agenda and force other parties to address immigration issues more directly. Ümit Özdağ's anti-immigration rhetoric has been a central pillar of the ZP's platform. He has consistently framed the presence of Syrian refugees and other immigrants as a "silent invasion," threatening Türkiye's national identity and security.⁴ This narrative has resonated with a significant portion of the electorate, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions where competition for jobs and resources is intense (Elçi, 2022;

⁴ The Silent Invasion documentary produced by the Zafer Party critically examines the discourse surrounding immigration issues in Türkiye. This documentary focuses on the party's policies regarding immigration, specifically the implications of foreign populations on Türkiye's social fabric, economic conditions, and national security. More about Silent Invasion Documentry, retrieved from, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpPo5vjC2bE> 16 September 2024

Özdemir, 2023). In his speeches and media appearances, Özdağ frequently employs stark imagery and nationalist rhetoric. For example, during a televised debate, he used maps highlighting Syrian refugee centers and pro-Kurdish regions to emphasize his point. This visual strategy, coupled with his assertive public speaking style, has effectively communicated his message to a broad audience (Balta, Elçi, and Sert, 2023). The ZP's success can be partly attributed to its strategic use of media and online platforms. Özdağ's frequent appearances on prime-time TV and his engagement with social media have ensured that the party's anti-immigration message reaches a wide audience. The dystopian short film "Silent Invasion," which depicts a future where a Syrian party wins Turkish elections and declares Arabic the official language, went viral and significantly boosted the party's visibility (Elçi, 2022). Social media metrics and engagement data indicate high levels of activity and support for the ZP's content. The party has effectively used platforms like YouTube and Twitter to disseminate its message, creating an online community that actively promotes its anti-immigration stance. This digital strategy has been crucial in mobilizing supporters and shaping public opinion (Balta, Elçi, and Sert, 2023). Quantitative analyses of public opinion surveys reveal a significant shift towards anti-immigration sentiment among Turkish voters. (KONDA, 2023). Polls conducted before and after the 2023 elections indicated growing support for stricter immigration policies. To be more specific according to the KONDA reports, there is different dynamics and reaction in each city which can lead a different political attitude to the immigrants. This shift is particularly pronounced among younger voters and those in economically disadvantaged regions, who perceive immigrants as a threat to their economic well-being and social stability (Sert, Danış, and Sevinin, 2023). Survey data also show that a substantial percentage of Turkish citizens support the ZP's call for the deportation of all refugees within a year. This radical proposal, while controversial, has found a receptive audience among voters frustrated with the government's handling of the refugee crisis (Özdemir, 2023).

The ZP's rise has forced other political entities to address immigration issues more directly. The opposition CHP and İYİ Party, for example, adopted more stringent immigration policies in response to the ZP's growing popularity. This shift was evident in the 2023 election campaign, where immigration emerged as a central issue. The ZP's success in framing this debate demonstrated its ability to set the political agenda, even without holding a significant number of parliamentary seats (Sert, Danış, and Sevinin, 2023). The party's endorsement of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu in the second round of the presidential election and the subsequent negotiations for key ministerial positions underscored its political leverage. The seven-point

memorandum of agreement between the ZP and Kılıçdaroğlu highlighted the party's ability to negotiate significant policy concessions in exchange for political support. This move not only demonstrated the ZP's political acumen but also underscored its role as a kingmaker in the closely contested election (TASAM, 2022).

The ZP's adept use of social media platforms like YouTube and Twitter played a pivotal role in amplifying its message and reaching a broader audience. Özdağ's speeches and party content were frequently shared on YouTube, gaining significant traction and fostering a robust online community that echoed the party's anti-immigration stance. The use of visual content, such as the "Silent Invasion" film, further intensified the party's message, creating a sense of urgency and mobilizing supporters (Elçi, 2022). Academic analyses and reports from organizations like SETA have also highlighted the ZP's strategic use of online platforms to disseminate its narrative. This digital strategy not only boosted the party's visibility but also allowed it to influence public opinion effectively, demonstrating the power of social media in modern political campaigns (Balta, Elçi, and Sert, 2023). According to the KONDA Quantitative analyses of public opinion and voting patterns reveal a significant shift towards the ZP's rhetoric. (KONDA, 2023). Surveys conducted before and after the 2023 elections indicated a growing concern among Turkish citizens regarding immigration, with a substantial percentage expressing support for stricter immigration policies. The ZP's messaging resonated particularly well with younger voters and those in economically disadvantaged regions, where concerns about job competition and social services were most acute (Sert, Daniş, and Sevinin, 2023). Furthermore, data from social media interactions and engagement metrics showed high levels of activity and support for the ZP's content, indicating a well-orchestrated online campaign that effectively tapped into prevailing public sentiments. (MetroPOLL, Ankara, 2023) This data-driven approach underscores the importance of integrating quantitative findings into political strategy, enhancing the party's ability to mobilize supporters and shape public discourse (Elçi, 2022). The 2023 elections highlighted the ZP's role in reshaping Turkish politics, particularly in its ability to influence the agendas of larger, more established parties.

By pushing immigration to the forefront of political debate, the ZP forced other parties to address these issues more directly, leading to a broader shift in political discourse. This impact is a testament to the party's strategic acumen and its ability to leverage public sentiment to its advantage (Özdemir, 2023). The ZP, under the leadership of Ümit Özdağ, has significantly reshaped Turkish politics by bringing immigration to the forefront of political discourse. The party's anti-immigration rhetoric, strategic use of media, and ability to influence the policies of

larger political entities highlight its growing importance in Türkiye's political landscape. Despite not securing parliamentary seats in the 2023 election, the ZP's impact on public sentiment and political agendas underscores its role as a key player in shaping the future of Turkish politics (Sert, Daniş, and Sevinin, 2023).

One of the key moments when the ZP's influence on Turkish politics was most evident was the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment after the earthquakes in February 2023 and the fact that this opposition became even more evident during the 2023 election process. In this environment, the intense and strong anti-immigrant sentiment among the public increased the expectation that immigrants would be sent back to their countries and gained more space in political discourses and discussions (Balta et al., 2023). The ZP's attitude and political position, which fueled and increased the anti-immigrant sentiment that was at a certain level in society, eventually led other parties to develop similar discourses, while the opposition began to promise policies of repatriation, while the government began to develop discourses on border security (Balta et al., 2023). Against the AKP, the opposition parties entered the election with an anti-immigrant, right-wing populist discourse. Throughout the election, discourses focusing on the repatriation of Syrians were prominent in the rally areas (Daniş and Çoban, 2023).

The ZP's policies could lead to a more polarized political environment, where immigration becomes a central and contentious issue in future elections. As seen in European countries with strong radical right parties, mainstream political parties might adopt tougher immigration policies to counter the growing influence of the ZP and appeal to voters who are anxious about immigration. This shift could result in a significant change in Türkiye's immigration laws, potentially leading to more stringent border controls, enhanced security measures, and a reduction in the number of refugees and immigrants allowed into the country. The impact of these policies on Turkish society could be profound. Stricter immigration measures could exacerbate social tensions and conflicts between different ethnic and social groups, leading to increased instances of discrimination and xenophobia.

To wrap up, ZP, represents a notable force in the shifting landscape of Turkish politics, particularly in the context of the rise of far-right ideologies. By centering its platform on nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric, the party has successfully brought immigration to the forefront of political discourse in Türkiye, forcing more established political entities to address these issues more directly. The party's strategic use of media and online platforms has amplified its message, allowing it to resonate with a significant portion of the electorate, particularly in regions facing economic challenges. Despite its relatively recent establishment and modest

electoral gains, the ZP has managed to exert considerable influence over the political agenda, exemplifying how far-right movements can leverage public sentiment to reshape national politics. The party's impact, particularly in framing the 2023 election discourse, underscores the broader trend of populist and nationalist movements gaining momentum by addressing fears surrounding immigration and national identity, highlighting the evolving dynamics of Turkish politics.



5. ANALYTICAL OUTCOMES

Within the framework of this study, the purpose of the content analysis is to conduct in-depth, descriptive analyses of the texts obtained by the researcher (Powers & Knapp, 2006). The patterns, trends, relationships, and structures within the texts obtained through content analysis are examined and categorized within the scope of discourses (Gbrich, 2007). In this study, thematic analysis, one of the qualitative analysis approaches, has been employed. The data obtained have been analyzed within the themes indicated in the research methodology, namely Anti-immigration and Nationalism, Commitment to Atatürk's Principles, and Anti-Corruption Measures.

This section consists of three parts. In the first part, the ZP's election manifestos were analyzed and evaluated within the framework of the themes. In the second part, detailed examinations of the ZP's election rallies on the YouTube platform were presented. Finally, the articles featuring the ZP in the Sabah and Cumhuriyet newspapers between 01.01.2024, and 31.04.2024, were analyzed in the context of research themes and the newspapers' attitudes towards the ZP and its founder and leader, Ümit Özdağ.

5.1. Analysis of the Zafer Party's Election Manifesto

In this part of the study, the analysis results of the Zafer Party's election declarations were presented. The election declarations consisted of party's manifest article.

5.1.1. Zafer Party's Manifesto

Firstly, the Zafer Party's manifesto article was investigated in order to evaluate and explore the party's goals, and ideologies and answer the research questions. The Manifesto article published on 26.08.2021 and it presents detailed information about the party's ideology, policies, goals and strategic vision for Türkiye. It consists of 44 pages and in general this manifest article's narrative centered on this research's three themes which of anti-immigration and nationalism, commitment to Atatürk principles and anti corruption measures. To the basis

with a variety of historical references, nationalistic rhetoric and policy proposals this manifesto article aims to resonate deeply with the target voters.

When the structure of the manifesto was examined it begins with historical events and figures such as Atatürk and Turkish War of Independence corresponds with a strong national foundation and pride. The language throughout the manifesto is assertive and unambiguous, reflects the party's stance research themes. Also tone of voice is evocative and confrontational that designed to gain support by appealing to a sense of patriotism and nationalism.

In terms of content, the manifesto gives information about the party's position on repatriating immigrants and social issues and burdens that occur by the influx of the immigrants. Manifesto highlights the ZP's commitment to restoring the secular, nationalistic values established by Atatürk, portraying the current political landscape as a deviation from these foundations. In addition, manifesto article outlines extensive anti-corruption measures, proposing significant reforms aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency in government. Moreover, the ZP's manifesto is important for its strategic use of historical narrative and nationalistic rhetoric. This approach not only reinforces the party's ideological position but also aims to increase public support by creating a sense of historical continuity and national duty. The document's detailed policy proposals and clear articulation of the party's vision underscore its comprehensive approach to addressing Türkiye's current and ongoing challenges.

To sum up ZP's manifesto is a document that combines historical reverence, nationalistic fervor, and pragmatic policy proposals. With its contents and language that in form of assertive makes a tool for political mobilization and persuasion. More importantly It could be seen that the general framework of the article is formed within the framework of research themes.

5.1.1.1. Manifesto Examination by Theme 1: Anti-immigration and Nationalism

The ZP's manifesto is well characterized by frequently mentioned anti-immigration sentiments and Turkish nationalism. Throughout the document there were many mentions and evaluations about the issues that occurs by the influx of immigration.

The Zafer Party's manifesto articulates a bold intention to repatriate 13 million refugees, particularly focusing on Syrians and Afghans, within a one-year timeframe. This objective

reflects a strong commitment to national homogeneity and sovereignty, revealing the party's underlying ideology that prioritizes a unified national identity.

The manifesto opens with a powerful pledge: *We promise the Great Turkish Nation: We will work tirelessly and relentlessly until the last Syrian refugee and the last Afghan have returned to their home countries. We give our word to the Turkish Nation: Everyone will return to their homeland. (P:13)* This statement not only underscores the party's resolve but also frames repatriation as a moral imperative, suggesting that the fulfillment of this promise is essential for national integrity. In further emphasizing its stance, the party conveys a sense of exclusivity regarding national identity. The manifesto states, *We do not harbor any ill feelings towards Syrians or Afghans. However, we do not wish to share our homeland with you. We would like to host you in our country only as tourists. (P:13)* This declaration reflects a clear rejection of long-term residency for foreign nationals, indicating that their presence is only acceptable under restricted circumstances. Such a perspective highlights a longing for a homogenous society where foreign influence is minimized.

Moreover, the party's narrative culminates in a poignant call for repatriation, as expressed in the assertion, *Syrians, Afghans, we do not harbor any ill feelings towards you. However, the Turkish people are now exhausted. As friends of the Turkish people, it is time for you to return home and rebuild your country. (P:13)* This statement illustrates a complex interplay of empathy and urgency, appealing to the refugees' sense of responsibility while simultaneously expressing the fatigue felt by the Turkish populace. It positions repatriation not just as a political necessity but as a collective moral endeavor. Through these interconnected statements, the Zafer Party not only emphasizes its dedication to national identity but also adopts a forceful and exclusionary approach to refugee repatriation. This theme of repatriation emerges as a defining characteristic of the party's political platform, reflecting broader socio-political dynamics in Türkiye.

The Zafer Party's manifesto places a strong emphasis on preserving Turkish identity and sovereignty, which are portrayed as fundamental tenets for national unity and pride. The party asserts that, historically, the true will of the Turkish Nation has been overlooked by previous political parties. This sentiment is encapsulated in the declaration, *The Turkish Nation declares that Türkiye belongs to the Turks, and until now, this will of our Nation has not been represented by any political party. As of today, the will of the Turkish Nation is being represented in Turkish politics. (P:8)* This statement not only affirms the party's commitment to authentically representing Turkish interests but also seeks to restore a sense of historical legitimacy.

The manifesto further proclaims, “*The Victory Party Represents the Will of the Turkish Nation.*” (P:10) This assertion underscores the party’s positioning as a vehicle for expressing national aspirations, portraying itself as the rightful representative of the Turkish populace's desires and needs. By aligning itself closely with the notion of the Turkish Nation, the party cultivates a narrative of unity and collective identity.

Additionally, the manifesto evokes historical context to reinforce its message, stating, *We have come together to establish the Victory Party to defend the peace, prosperity, and unity of the Turkish Nation during a time when we must shield our beloved country against a shameless onslaught. A century after our War of Independence, we are leading the Turkish Nation toward victory in the face of this second attack on our homeland.* (P:10) This reference to the War of Independence serves to evoke a sense of historical continuity and resilience, positioning the current struggle as a continuation of past sacrifices made for national sovereignty. The rhetoric of defending the nation against external threats not only appeals to historical pride but also aims to galvanize support around the party's agenda.

Through these interconnected themes, the Zafer Party's manifesto seeks to cultivate a strong sense of nationalism and pride in Turkish identity, asserting that sovereignty and unity are paramount in the face of perceived threats. This framing positions the party as a defender of national values, aligning its political platform with the aspirations of the Turkish Nation.

The Zafer Party's manifesto positions immigrants as key contributors to Türkiye's recent economic challenges, presenting their departure as essential for restoring economic stability. According to the party, the influx of refugees and illegal immigrants has not only increased living costs but has also diminished the quality of life for Turkish citizens. In this narrative, immigrants are depicted as economic liabilities, whose continued presence is seen as detrimental to the nation's economic health.

One of the manifesto's core arguments is that the return of millions of refugees and illegal immigrants would lead to an immediate reduction in the cost of living. Specifically, it claims, *When 8 million refugees and illegal immigrants return to their countries, rent prices will decrease. When 8 million refugees and illegal immigrants return to their countries, the prices of essential food items, among others, will decrease, and purchasing power will increase.* (P:14) This assertion reflects the party's belief that immigrants are inflating basic costs, especially in housing and food sectors, and that their departure would alleviate financial pressures on Turkish citizens.

The manifesto further personalizes this economic narrative by addressing the impact of immigration on everyday life in specific regions. It states, *The Victory Party is the party of the Turkish people struggling to make ends meet due to rising rents caused by the influx of Syrians in Istanbul, Konya, Mersin, and Gaziantep.* (P:11) By highlighting these cities, the party draws attention to regions where the effects of rising rents are most acutely felt, framing itself as the defender of Turkish citizens who have been economically marginalized by the presence of refugees.

Beyond rent and food prices, the party also highlights what it views as unfair competition between Turkish and immigrant businesses. The manifesto asserts, *The Turkish grocer, market vendor, greengrocer, tailor, taxi driver, and baker are facing racist exclusion. Even if it's cheaper, Syrians do not shop from Turks. Moreover, while Turkish businesses pay their taxes and social security contributions even during pandemics, Syrians, who do not pay taxes or social security, take over the businesses of bankrupt Turkish shopkeepers.* (P:9) This statement not only accuses immigrants of unfair competition but also portrays them as undermining local businesses, thereby contributing to a broader economic decline for Turkish citizens.

In summary, the Zafer Party's manifesto is characterized by a strong emphasis on anti-immigration sentiments intertwined with Turkish nationalism. It articulates the party's intention to repatriate 13 million refugees within a year, prioritizing national consciousness and sovereignty. The manifesto also positions immigrants as a root cause of Türkiye's economic downturn, arguing that their departure is vital for the country's economic stabilization. By framing immigrants as economic burdens and emphasizing their role in the country's economic difficulties, the Zafer Party seeks to align itself with the struggles of everyday Turkish citizens.

5.1.1.2. Manifesto Examination by Theme 2: Commitment to Atatürk's Principles

When the manifesto is examined by the research's second theme it could be stated that the manifesto and by the manifesto ZP aligns itself with the principles of Atatürk that reflects strong commitment to secularism and nationalism.

The Zafer Party's manifesto strongly advocates for the reassertion of secular and nationalist principles, viewing these as the foundational pillars of the Republic established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The party positions itself as the inheritor of Atatürk's legacy, promising to restore these values in governance through the power it aims to achieve. This

ideological foundation not only serves as the core of the party's platform but also aligns with a broader appeal to national unity and sovereignty. The manifesto emphasizes that *The Victory Party was established to lead Türkiye out of this period of decline under the guidance of cadres who embrace Turkish Nationalism in line with Atatürk's principles and to achieve new victories.* (P:18) This statement illustrates the party's belief that the country has deviated from its original path, with Atatürk's principles of secularism and nationalism being overshadowed. By framing its mission as a new era of "victories," the party suggests a return to the original ideals that once guided the nation's development. Furthermore, the manifesto asserts, *The Victory Party was founded to defend and uphold national unity and solidarity.* (P:10) This assertion highlights the party's commitment to preserving and strengthening the sense of collective identity among Turkish citizens, which it perceives as being under threat. The emphasis on national unity is a key element of the party's strategy, as it seeks to galvanize support by appealing to shared cultural and historical values.

In addition, the party ties its platform directly to the legacy of Atatürk, stating, *The Victory Party is the creation of those who have united, and those who wish to unite, under the direction pointed out by Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, within the framework defined by our Republic's values, and under the leadership of Turkish nationalism.* (P:19) This reference to Atatürk's leadership and the founding principles of the Republic is designed to evoke a sense of continuity with the nation's past while suggesting that the party is uniquely positioned to revive these ideals in the present. By anchoring itself in Atatürk's legacy, the Zafer Party not only underscores its commitment to secularism and nationalism but also differentiates itself from other political actors who, in its view, have strayed from these guiding principles.

The Zafer Party's manifesto outlines a clear vision of governance rooted in the secular and nationalist values established by Atatürk. The party promises to restore these principles to their rightful place in the political sphere, using its platform to advocate for national unity, solidarity, and a renewed commitment to the ideals of the Republic. This narrative of revival and re-sovereignty is central to the party's ideological appeal, positioning it as a defender of the nation's historical identity.

The Zafer Party manifesto emphasizes a deep commitment to the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, positioning itself as the guardian of the historical and republican legacy that he left behind. Central to the party's mission is the belief that Türkiye's current political and social problems can be solved by returning to the values and vision of Atatürk, underscoring the importance of both secularism and nationalism. The manifesto reflects a longing for continuity

with the past, presenting the party as the rightful custodian of Türkiye's historical identity and republican heritage.

A striking example of this is the party's declaration, *Starting from August 26, 2021, the Victory Party will represent the will of the Turkish Nation to maintain its independence, prosperity, unity, and defend its existence in Anatolia, on the 99th anniversary of the Great Offensive and the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert, which made Anatolia a homeland for the Turkish Nation.* (P:4) By invoking these key moments in Turkish history, the manifesto ties the party's mission to the broader historical narrative of Turkish sovereignty and identity, situating itself as a direct descendant of these historical milestones. Furthermore, the party portrays its commitment as transcending mere political aspirations, stating, *We, as members of the Victory Party, are not fighting for positions but for our homeland. We, as Victory Party members, are committed to carrying the legacy that stretches from Alparslan to Atatürk into the next 1,000 years.* (P:41) This sentiment reflects a long-term vision that connects past and future, framing the party's political goals as part of a larger, enduring struggle for national survival and success. The reference to Alparslan, the victor of the Battle of Manzikert, alongside Atatürk, reinforces the notion of an unbroken historical continuum of Turkish leadership and defense of the homeland.

Additionally, the manifesto promises that, under the leadership of the Victory Party, Türkiye will realize its full potential: *The march of the Victory Party will race with the winds. The Turkish Nation will see how close those goals, which once seemed distant, truly are.* (P:14) This rhetoric serves to inspire confidence in the party's vision, promising that a return to Atatürk's principles will lead to a renewed sense of national pride and achievement. In conclusion, the Zafer Party's manifesto emphasizes a strong connection to Atatürk's principles and the historical legacy of the Turkish Republic. The party frames its mission within the broader narrative of Turkish history, positioning itself as the force that will guide Türkiye back to its foundational values to solve contemporary political and social challenges. By invoking key historical figures and events, the party seeks to inspire a sense of continuity and national resurgence, appealing to a collective memory of past victories and promising future ones under its leadership.

Another key perspective that emerges from the Zafer Party's manifesto is its commitment to Atatürk's vision of a united Turkish nation. In line with Atatürk's principles, the party emphasizes the cultural integrity of all citizens living within Turkish borders, promising to prevent divisive policies, movements, or elements that may threaten national

cohesion. The manifesto repeatedly stresses the importance of unity, framing it as a core element of its mission to safeguard the Republic. The party articulates this stance by asserting, *The Victory Party will once again be the address of unity in Türkiye, embracing all our citizens.* (P:26) This statement emphasizes inclusivity, portraying the party as a unifying force that aims to bring together all segments of society under a common national identity. In doing so, the Zafer Party seeks to position itself as the defender of Turkish unity in a time when, according to the party, external and internal forces threaten to sow division.

Moreover, the manifesto declares, *We will unite the Turkish Nation and stand against division.* (P:26) This reflects the party's determination to resist any movements or policies that might fragment the nation, aligning with Atatürk's vision of a strong, indivisible state. By invoking this principle, the Zafer Party aims to connect its platform to the foundational values of the Republic, reinforcing its commitment to maintaining national solidarity.

Additionally, the party underscores its allegiance to the Turkish people through its declaration: *The Victory Party will form its alliance with the Turkish Nation. The Victory Party will once again be the address of unity in Türkiye, embracing all our citizens.* (P:26) This focus on forming an "alliance" with the people echoes Atatürk's belief in the importance of the relationship between the state and its citizens, grounded in mutual trust and collective responsibility. The manifesto positions the party as the natural continuation of this vision, aiming to restore unity by addressing any divisive issues that may have emerged in recent years.

In short, the Zafer Party's manifesto demonstrates a strong commitment to secularism, nationalism, and Atatürk's principles. The party not only promises to re-establish the secular and nationalist foundations of the Republic but also emphasizes its historical heritage and vows to oppose any threat of division. This unwavering commitment to Atatürk's vision of unity strengthens the party's ideological stance and is likely intended to resonate with voters who prioritize these values in contemporary Turkish politics.

5.1.1.3. Manifesto Examination by Theme 3: Anti – Corruption Measures

The third and final theme of the research is the fight against corruption, and while the election manifesto of the Victory Party displays a determined stance against corruption, the importance of transparency and accountability in administration is clearly emphasized.

A central focus of the manifesto is the fight against corruption, which is presented as a critical issue in Türkiye's current political landscape. Corruption is framed as a significant

obstacle to good governance and public trust, and the manifesto critiques the existing government for its inability to effectively address this pervasive problem. To counter this, the party pledges a rigorous campaign to combat corruption at all levels, promising transparency, accountability, and the enforcement of strict legal measures. The manifesto makes it clear that *every judicial and administrative measure will be applied without compromise to ensure that those who engage in corruption do not escape unpunished*. (P:20) This uncompromising approach reflects the party's commitment to a zero-tolerance policy on corruption, signaling its intent to restore integrity within the government. By prioritizing the prosecution of corrupt individuals, the party aims to reassure the public that justice will be served, creating a governance system that is both transparent and accountable.

Targeting specific institutions, the manifesto also calls for the dissolution of the Türkiye Wealth Fund, stating, *We will dissolve the Türkiye Wealth Fund and open the use of the Turkish people's resources to independent auditing by the Court of Accounts*. (P:31) This proposal addresses long-standing concerns about the lack of transparency and oversight in the management of public resources. By promising to subject these resources to independent audits, the party highlights its focus on economic responsibility and the protection of national assets.

Despite the strong rhetoric on corruption, the manifesto takes care to present the party's mission as one of peace and unity rather than revenge, stating, *The Victory Party is not a party of vengeance, hatred, or animosity. The Victory Party is a party of peace and unity*. (P:27) This balanced approach suggests that while the fight against corruption will be vigorous, it will be conducted fairly and transparently, avoiding any perception of political retribution. The party seeks to build a governance framework that is just but also reconciliatory, promoting social harmony alongside its drive for justice. In conclusion, combating corruption is positioned as a cornerstone of the party's platform, with a clear pledge to pursue legal and administrative reforms that enhance accountability. Through its strong anti-corruption stance, combined with its broader message of unity and peace, the party seeks to restore public trust and ensure that governance serves the people of Türkiye with transparency and fairness.

In the context of economic challenges, the manifesto draws a direct link between increasing corruption and Türkiye's current economic difficulties. It argues that corruption has disrupted the country's economic system and stresses that meaningful reforms are required to reverse this trend. Justice, transparency, and the efficient distribution of public resources are key principles that the manifesto highlights as essential for stabilizing the economy and promoting sustainable growth. One of the central critiques is that *The Victory Party has severed*

Türkiye from production and driven it toward bankruptcy through corruption and a rent-seeking economy. (P:28) This statement underscores the party's belief that the root causes of economic instability lie in mismanagement and corrupt practices that have prioritized short-term profits over long-term production and development. By emphasizing that key assets, including factories and production facilities, have been sold off, the manifesto presents corruption as having led to the dismantling of Türkiye's economic achievements since the founding of the Republic

As part of its solution, the party pledges to *reestablish the State Planning Organization*, outlining a vision for long-term economic planning with *12-year development plans* aimed at efficiently allocating state resources. This emphasis on strategic planning reflects the party's focus on reversing the negative effects of corruption by introducing systematic reforms that prioritize productivity and sustainability. The commitment to avoid waste and target productive areas suggests a comprehensive approach to economic recovery. Moreover, the manifesto identifies the party as "the party of justice, merit, and economic development," linking the fight against corruption to a broader vision of governance that upholds fairness and efficiency. By positioning itself as a party of justice, the manifesto seeks to reassure voters that economic development will be achieved through fair distribution of resources, transparent governance, and merit-based leadership. This is presented as not only a solution to the economic crisis but also to the broader state and national unity crises that the party believes are interconnected with corruption and economic mismanagement.

In summary, the manifesto presents a strong critique of the current economic situation, attributing much of the blame to corruption and a rent-seeking economy. By advocating for justice, transparency, and efficient resource allocation through long-term planning, the party seeks to position itself as the agent of economic reform and recovery.

Justice and accountability are central themes in the manifesto's stance on corruption. It argues that the lack of these elements in governance has been a major contributor to the nation's current challenges. The manifesto stresses that justice and accountability are not only vital for effective governance but also for restoring public trust. If elected, the party pledges to reinstate honesty, transparency, and trust in public institutions, framing these values as essential for rebuilding the state. One of the key promises is to *restore the Turkish state to the Turkish Nation*, signaling a commitment to return control of the government to the people, along with a return to proper governance practices. The manifesto also takes a clear stand against cronyism in foreign policy, noting that *Turkish foreign policy will not be conducted with fake diplomats*

but with real ones, which underscores the party's focus on merit-based appointments rather than political favoritism.

Furthermore, the manifesto highlights the importance of the rule of law, stating that *separation of powers is the foundation of the rule of law*. Within this framework, the party pledges to reestablish an independent judiciary, which it argues is crucial for ensuring justice and holding individuals accountable for corrupt actions. This emphasis on judicial independence reflects the party's broader commitment to legal reforms aimed at reinforcing accountability across the system. Additionally, the manifesto proposes *a state system based on merit, one that revives the wisdom and conscience of the state*. This vision aligns with the party's broader goal of replacing nepotism and corruption with a meritocratic system where the most qualified individuals lead public institutions, thereby fostering greater trust in government processes.

In conclusion, the manifesto outlines a strong stance against corruption by emphasizing the critical need for justice, transparency, and accountability at all levels of governance. It critiques the current administration for its failures in these areas and promises significant reforms to restore public confidence if the party gains political power.

5.2. Analysis of the YouTube Rally Recordings

In this section of the study, another focus of the study examining the 2023 rallies of the ZP was conducted. In this context, the rallies held by the Zafer Party in different cities and platforms were investigated. Within the scope of the conducted research, the following limitation was observed: due to the limited attendance at these rallies held by the Zafer Party in 2023, the YouTube recordings could not be obtained from a single source. Instead, the recordings were reviewed from various videos, and transcribed, and these transcriptions were supported by press releases for further analysis.

5.3.1. Şırnak Press Conference

On 24.04.2023 ZP and its leader Ümit Özdağ held a press conference in Şırnak This press conference lasted 17 minutes and 50 seconds⁵. The video begins with Özdağ and the ZP team entering Şırnak, being welcomed, then the singing of the National Anthem in a hall and

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjIIcO92TLQ>

the introduction of the program. Özdağ's speech referred to all three themes of the research and detailed examinations are presented in this section.

Regarding the theme of anti-immigration and nationalism, the ZP's stance on immigration is prominently highlighted in the speech. The party leader addresses the economic and social burdens caused by immigrants, especially Syrians, and Özdağ reflects a strong nationalistic perspective. The speech also emphasizes the financial burden on Turkish citizens due to the costs related to immigrants, such as healthcare and social services, which are described as disproportionately benefiting immigrants at the expense of Turkish nationals. For example, between 6:00 and 6:07 of the speech, Özdağ says the following sentence and supports his stance; "You go to the pharmacy to buy aspirin and pay 49 lira, but millions of Syrians get aspirin for free, paid for by you." This statement encapsulates his argument about the perceived injustices faced by Turkish citizens, positioning the Zafer Party as a defender of national interests against the backdrop of immigration policies.

Özdağ's speech especially states that the financial benefits offered to immigrants are realized within the framework of inequality and supports his idea as follows: *You go to the hospital for surgery, and even if you have insurance, you have to pay for what the state doesn't cover. But Syrians don't pay; you pay for their surgeries too* (6:09 - 6:36), illustrating the perceived inequity in the healthcare system; *When you consider having a child, you wonder if you can afford it. Meanwhile, Syrians are encouraged by the state to have more children with promises of economic support* (6:41 - 7:12), further emphasizing the differential treatment of citizens versus immigrants.

Additionally, Özdağ emphasizes the nationalistic view by stating how the presence of immigrants blocks the country's development when he says the following statements: *Thirteen million refugees and illegal immigrants are dragging Türkiye down like weights tied to our legs. We are struggling to stay afloat* (8:01 - 8:17), illustrating the perceived hindrance to national progress; and *Our Prophet said that prolonged hospitality becomes a burden on the host. We are now burdened and facing oppression* (8:20 - 8:31), further reinforcing his argument about the negative impacts of immigration on Turkish society. This rhetoric serves to evoke a sense of urgency and crisis, positioning the Zafer Party as a defender of national interests against what they perceive as an overwhelming immigrant presence that threatens Türkiye's future.

In summary, at this press conference held in Şırnak, Özdağ, and ZP clearly expressed their party's stance on this issue by emphasizing the economic burden of immigrants.

Within the framework of the second theme of the research, which focuses on commitment to Atatürk's principles, the Zafer Party (ZP) reiterated its stance during this event. In his speech, Özdağ pays tribute to Mahmut Tatar, who was martyred by the PKK terrorist organization, and integrates this narrative into his message. He asserts that 'the Tatar family has stood against every attack on the Turkish nation and state since the founding of the republic and will continue to do so' (4:03 - 4:05). By aligning themselves with Atatürk's legacy, the Zafer Party seeks to enhance their legitimacy and resonate with voters who cherish Atatürk's vision for a secular, unified, and sovereign Türkiye. Further emphasizing this connection, Özdağ remarks: 'Mahmut Tatar and the Tatar family have been comrades of Atatürk, and we take pride in walking this path with them in Şırnak' (3:38 - 3:41). This alignment not only underscores ZP's commitment to Atatürk's ideals but also serves to differentiate the party from others that may lack such a direct affiliation.

Lastly, regarding the anti-corruption measures, even though Özdağ did not directly make comments about this theme regarding the current government and its policies, the speech suggests that resources and support are being misallocated, favoring immigrants over Turkish citizens, which could be interpreted as a form of corruption or mismanagement. Özdağ's call for more significant actions to protect Turkish citizens from possible external and internal threats also hints at a desire for just governance and more accountability. This emphasis on national sovereignty and prioritizing Turkish citizens' needs can be seen as a call to reduce corruption and ensure that government actions directly benefit the populace. Özdağ criticizes the government's handling of security concerns, suggesting negligence and lack of proper measures by stating, *Despite the threats from the terrorist organization that was known to security forces, our patriotic citizen was not protected, leading to his tragic death* (2:20 - 2:30), by highlighting perceived failures in ensuring citizen safety. He further asserts that *If the Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, had shown the same concern for our citizens fighting the PKK as he does for Syrians, this tragedy could have been prevented* (2:36 - 2:54), indicating a misallocation of attention and resources. Ultimately, these statements could be perceived as a misallocation of attention, resources, and management.

5.3.2. Analysis of the Zafer Party's Speech in Gaziantep

The second video examined is dated 23.03.2023 and in this video, Özdağ and the ZP delegation are in contact in Gaziantep within the framework of their election tour. In this section, the important points in these contacts are examined and evaluated within the framework of the research themes. The video is 11 minutes and 47 seconds long.⁶

As in many of the Zafer Party's interactions with its targeted voters, this event also discusses the problems and threats posed by illegal refugees and the disproportionate transfer of resources to refugees, especially Syrians, rather than Turkish citizens. Özdağ emphasizes these concerns with statements such as Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Hatay, Adana, Mersin, Konya, Istanbul, Bursa, İzmir these cities are under a covert invasion by 1.5 million Syrians (0:51 - 1:19). He further warns, "If this continues, by 2040 you will be a minority in this city (2:02 - 2:09). In another instance, he highlights the tensions arising in local economies, stating, In Kilis, shopkeepers are told by Syrians, 'We will stay, you will leave' (2:29 - 2:37). Finally, he frames the election as a pivotal moment, asserting, This election is not a simple party choice; it is a referendum on whether Türkiye will remain Türkiye or become a land of immigrants (2:44 - 2:56).

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that in this recording, Özdağ does not directly mention the issues regarding the second and third themes. However, it is clear that during his interactions in Gaziantep, Özdağ focused primarily on the challenges posed by immigration, the inequalities of opportunity, and the economic issues stemming from the region's intense immigrant population. By foregrounding these topics, Özdağ seeks to resonate with voters who may feel marginalized by the existing immigration policies, framing the discourse around national identity and economic stability. This strategy not only aims to galvanize support for the Zafer Party but also reinforces the narrative of prioritizing Turkish citizens' needs in the face of perceived threats from immigration.

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYqQONbyz_k

5.3.3. Analysis of Ümit Özdağ's Interview on İbrahim Haskaloğlu's Youtube Channel

In analyzing the March 3, 2023, interview with Ümit Özdağ on İbrahim Haskaloğlu's internet channel main topic was the Özdağ's evaluations regarding the latest political developments such as the dismantle of the Millet Alliance.

Regarding the anti-immigration and nationalism theme, the interview extensively discusses the political situation within Türkiye, particularly the dynamics within the opposition parties. While the primary focus is not on immigration, Özdağ's nationalist rhetoric is clearly evident throughout the interview. Özdağ often states a need for the Turkish people to choose their own candidate, reflecting a nationalist perspective: (6:30 - 6:38), which *Not the six-party alliance, but the Turkish people themselves will choose their own candidate against Erdoğan*. This statement underscores the idea that the Turkish populace should assert their autonomy in political decisions, resonating with nationalist sentiments that prioritize national sovereignty and self-determination. By emphasizing the role of the Turkish people in selecting their candidate, Özdağ positions the Zafer Party as a champion of national interests, contrasting it with the existing political coalitions and reinforcing a narrative that calls for a return to a more nationalistic approach to governance. On the other hand, regarding the second theme, Özdağ criticizes the opposition parties for prioritizing their interests over the nation's well-being, which he views as a betrayal of Atatürk's legacy, particularly focusing on the CHP, which was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Özdağ highlights the importance of national interests over individual party gains: *The political engineers of the six-party alliance have become disconnected from the people by putting party interests ahead of Türkiye's interests*. (1:12 - 1:40). This statement reflects Özdağ's assertion that the opposition's actions undermine the foundational principles established by Atatürk, suggesting that true political leadership should prioritize the collective welfare of the nation. By emphasizing this disconnect, Özdağ positions the Zafer Party as a more genuine representative of national interests, contrasting it with the perceived self-serving motives of the opposition parties.

Additionally, he appeals to Mansur Yavaş, emphasizing that loyalty to Atatürk and the nation should outweigh personal or political loyalty: (8:06 - 8:10), *Your sense of gratitude towards Mr. Kemal cannot surpass your sense of gratitude towards Atatürk*. Overall, this statement reinforces the commitment to Atatürk's principles of national unity and integrity, urging political leaders to prioritize the nation's interests above all. By making this appeal, Özdağ positions Atatürk's legacy as a guiding force for contemporary political conduct,

suggesting that true loyalty to the nation requires a steadfast adherence to the foundational values established by Atatürk. This call for prioritizing national interests over party loyalties highlights Özdağ's vision for a politics that is more connected to the Turkish identity and less influenced by personal or party affiliations.

Thirdly, for the anti-corruption measures, the interview touches on issues of political transparency and accountability. Özdağ criticizes the internal decision-making processes of the opposition parties, suggesting that they are more focused on securing power than on representing the people's will. Özdağ points out the manipulative strategies of the opposition parties, arguing that this behavior does not align with the principles of democracy and good governance, implicitly calling for greater transparency and accountability in the political process: *What we are witnessing today is the Turkish people's objection... The stakeholders of the six-party alliance have focused not on the demands of the people, but on how many seats their parties will secure in the Parliament.* This statement highlights Özdağ's concern that the opposition parties prioritize their electoral strategies over the needs of the citizens, reflecting a significant disconnect between the political elite and the general populace. By emphasizing this point, Özdağ advocates for a political environment where the voices of the people are truly heard and valued, reinforcing the need for integrity and responsibility in governance.

In summary, this interview is different from ZP's other interviews, rallies and statements reflected in the press and carries criticism towards the opposition bloc rather than the ruling party. As a result, when the strategy of ZP is evaluated from a broad perspective, it is seen that the discourse and strategies differ regionally. For example, Ümit Özdağ bases his addressing strategy on anti-immigration in regions where refugees are dense, while in regions where the opposition bloc is in power, he criticizes the opposition and emphasizes loyalty to Atatürk's principles. On the other hand, in regions and circles where AKP is dominant, it is seen that the discourse and strategies created within the framework of the third theme of the research, corruption and the fight against corruption, are dominant. As can be seen, ZP has a flexible and dynamic stance and discourse strategy and appeals to nationalist, Atatürkist and nationally conscious voters.

5.3.4. Analysis of Özdağ's Speech on the Marmara Region Parliamentary Candidate Introduction Meeting

On 18.04.2023 ZP held a candidate introduction meeting about the Marmara region. The presentation of parliamentary candidates for the Marmara Region under the Ata Alliance was held at the Küçükçekmece Yahya Kemal Beyatlı Performance Center and took a total duration of 1 hour and 51 minutes. During this event, Ümit Özdağ delivered a speech between the 22nd and 50th minutes, following which the introduction of the candidates commenced and closure.

Regarding the anti-immigration and nationalism theme, the speech is heavily characterized by criticism of the allocation of Türkiye's social and economic resources to immigrants. Özdağ asserts that immigrants have been a burden on the Turkish economy and social dynamics, reducing the quality of life for Turkish citizens. He emphasizes the need for the revision of immigration policies and prioritization of the interests of Turkish citizens. In the speech, Özdağ makes the following statements regarding the anti-immigration view: "It will be decided by the Turkish populace on May 14 whether 13 million refugees and illegal immigrants will return to their countries or remain in Türkiye" (26:04 - 26:19). He further warns, *If it is desired that Türkiye remains as the Republic of Türkiye, votes should be given to the Atay alliance; otherwise, any vote given will lead to a new 'immigrantistan' being formed by all* (29:42 - 29:55). These statements underline Özdağ's argument that the fate of immigration policy lies in the hands of the Turkish electorate, framing the issue as one of national sovereignty and identity. By portraying the upcoming election as a critical juncture for determining the future of Türkiye, Özdağ seeks to mobilize public sentiment against the perceived detrimental effects of immigration, advocating for a political shift that favors Turkish citizens over immigrants.

About the second research theme, Özdağ emphasizes the necessity of adhering strictly to the founding republic values and principles established by Atatürk. He advocates for the preservation of Atatürk's legacy and the use of his ideals as a guide in the governance of modern Türkiye. By contrasting Atatürk's values against those perceived as his enemies, the commitment to his principles is underscored. Supporting this theme, Özdağ states, *Will the presidency be occupied by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been accused of degrading the Republic of Türkiye founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for 21 years, or by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who has proposed legislation to rename the city of Tunceli to its former name, Dersim, in honor of Atatürk?* (23:20 - 24:02). He also asserts, that *Atatürk's middle school and Türkeş's Nine Lights have come together in the Hatay alliance, where Turkish nationalism and Atatürkism*

are represented solely by this alliance (48:04 - 48:19). These statements illustrate Özdağ's positioning of the Zafer Party as a guardian of Atatürk's principles, contrasting it with current political figures whom he views as undermining those values. By framing the political discourse around Atatürk's ideals, Özdağ aims to resonate with voters who cherish the founding principles of the Republic, thereby reinforcing a narrative that calls for a return to these fundamental values in contemporary governance.

Lastly, regarding the anti-corruption themes, Özdağ's speech mainly focuses on the mismanagement of state resources and how such mismanagement has manifested through immigration policies. He claims that strategic state institutions have been overtaken by structures such as FETÖ, adversely affecting Türkiye's national security. Thus, combating corruption is framed not only as an economic issue but also as a matter of national security. Özdağ states, *The brave officers, generals, judges, prosecutors, and police directors who attacked the military and all state institutions, claiming to dismantle military tutelage, were purged and replaced by members of FETÖ and other religious communities, thus substituting the so-called military tutelage with a tutelage of sheiks and religious communities, orchestrated by the AK Party administration* (24:41 - 25:19). He also remarks, *The fight against FETÖ, postulated as a mere revenge operation by Erdoğan after July 15, will be re-planned and executed as an existential issue for the Turkish state and nation* (45:30 - 45:55). These statements highlight Özdağ's assertion that the intertwining of corruption with national security poses a grave threat to Türkiye. By framing the struggle against FETÖ as essential to the state's survival, Özdağ emphasizes the urgency of addressing corruption not just for economic stability but for the preservation of national integrity and sovereignty. This narrative positions the Zafer Party as a proactive force advocating for transparency and accountability in governance, seeking to restore trust in state institutions.

5.3. Analysis of Newspaper Articles Regarding the ZP

In the analysis of news articles regarding the ZP, articles from Sabah and Cumhuriyet newspapers between January 1, 2024, and May 13, 2024, were examined. Firstly, articles from Sabah newspaper were analyzed. Upon examining the articles published in Sabah during this period, it was found that 29 articles addressed the ZP. On the one hand, the articles between the dates listed above mainly focused on the period from January 1 to May 1. Although the party launched its election process with the 'ATA' alliance, in the second round of the election, Ümit

Özdağ visually differentiated from the alliance leader Sinan Oğan in terms of supporting parties. On the other hand, due to differing views within the ATA alliance, the number of articles from May 1 to May 14 was limited and out of the themes. In Table 1 below, the orientations of 29 news articles featuring the ZP in Sabah were analyzed. According to the findings, it was determined that 14 (49%) of these articles exhibit a negative attitude towards the ZP, 13 (44%) are neutral, and 2 (7%) have a positive attitude.

Table 3. Distribution of News Orientations Published in Sabah Newspaper.

	N	%
Negative	14	49
Neutral	13	44
Positive	2	7
Total	29	100

In Table 2, the distribution of news articles concerning the research themes is presented. Upon examining the findings, it is observed that 10 (%35) news articles could be examined within the first research theme of "Anti-immigration and Nationalism," and 5 (%17) articles are related to the third research theme of "Anti-Corruption Measures." However, no news articles corresponding to the second research theme of "Atatürk's Principles" were found in Sabah Newspaper.

Table 4. Distribution of Research Themes According to the News Published in Sabah Newspaper

	N	%
<i>Anti – Immigration and Nationalism</i>	10	35
<i>Commitment to Atatürk's Principles</i>	0	0
<i>Anti – Corruption Measures</i>	5	17
<i>Total</i>	15	52

When examining some of the news articles in Sabah Newspaper regarding the ZP in chronological order, the article dated 05.01.2023 titled "Last minute in the FETÖ scandal exposed by SABAH: Engin Yıldırım resigned"⁷ contains statements that can be related to the Anti – Immigration and Nationalism. The statement by Özdağ, "A Turkish nationalist cannot be a FETÖ supporter," combines themes of Turkish nationalism and security, presenting a strong nationalist discourse. Özdağ's stance and the emphasis on his party's nationalist and anti-FETÖ policies could be clearly seen. In this context, Sabah Newspaper maintains a neutral stance towards the ZP and Özdağ while directly targeting the İYİ Party, a member of the Millet Alliance in this article.

On January 28, 2024, Sabah newspaper published an article titled *813 members who resigned from the Zafer and İYİ Party joined the MHP*.⁸ expressing the resignation of 813 members from the ZP and İYİ parties who then joined the MHP. This event highlights the flow of members and supporters among nationalist political parties in Turkish politics, reflecting the dynamics of nationalist ideology in Türkiye. Also, the article emphasizes the nationalist stance of the ZP within the study's first theme and maintains a neutral tone towards the ZP.

In February 2023, there was a major shift in Sabah newspaper's attitude towards the ZP and Özdağ. The major disasters on February 6-7, devastating earthquakes struck Kahramanmaraş's Pazarcık and Elbistan, measuring 7.8 and 7.5 in magnitude, respectively and these earthquakes resulted in significant casualties, injuries, property loss, and mass displacement. Following the earthquakes, a noticeable change in Sabah's attitude towards critics of the government were observed and ZP being one of the political actors affected by this change.

For example, in the Sabah's article dated February 10, 2023, titled *Second provocation from Ümit Özdağ! The young man accused of the 'Syrian thief' lie speaks: 'I leave you to God's judgment'*.⁹ ZP and Özdağ are strongly criticized. The article's lead text states; "Türkiye united as one after the Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquakes. The state and the nation mobilized with all their strength to heal wounds and rescue those under the rubble while also fighting against

⁷ Ilker, T. (2023, January 5). SABAH'ın ortaya çıkardığı FETÖ skandalında son dakika: Engin Yıldırım istifa etti. *Sabah*. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/01/05/sabahin-ortaya-cikardigi-feto-skandalinda-son-dakika-engin-yildirimer-istifa-etti>

⁸ Turak, I. (2024, January 28). Zafer ve İYİ Parti'den istifa eden 813 üye, MHP'ye katıldı. *Sabah*. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2024/01/28/zafer-ve-iyi-partiden-istifa-eden-813-uye-mhpye-katildi>

⁹ Sabah. (2023, February 10). Ümit Özdağ'dan 2. provokasyon! 'Suriyeli hırsız' yalanını attığı genç konuştu: Seni Allah'a havale ediyorum. Sabah Gazetesi. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/02/10/umit-ozdagdan-2-provokasyon-suriyeli-hirsiz-yalanini-attigi-genc-konustu-seni-allaha-havale-ediyorum>

disinformation and provocation attempts. ZP leader Özdağ added another to his black propaganda since the beginning of the earthquake. It was later revealed that the Özdağ's manipulation that "a Syrian stole a firefighter's phone on live broadcast" was a lie." The article directly opposes the Özdağ's stance against Syrian refugees by highlighting his claim about a Syrian stealing a firefighter's phone. This reflects Özdağ's anti-immigration and nationalist rhetoric, portraying Syrians in a negative way to foster nationalistic sentiments.

Another article published on the same day titled *Inhumane words from Ümit Özdağ! 'AK Party members are rescued first.'*¹⁰ features a sharper tone. The spot was "Known for his fascist rhetoric and provocations, ZP Chairman Ümit Özdağ made baseless claims that could incite public outrage following the devastating earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş. While Türkiye united as one, Özdağ's scandalous statements, suggesting that AK Party members were prioritized in rescue efforts, sparked social media backlash.". According to Sabah, Özdağ's statements are especially dangerous and divisive in times when societal solidarity is crucial. Such claims highlight the importance of the words and actions of community leaders and their impact on society. Analyzing this news within the research themes, it is evident that the themes of Anti-immigration and Nationalism is strongly present. ZP's political stance in this direction becomes more apparent in this disaster context.

In another, an article published on 11.02.2023 titled *Ümit Özdağ is being ridiculous again! There was a strong reaction on social media*¹¹ discusses Özdağ's statements targeting foreigners and using terms like "Syrian theft," which reflect his nationalist and anti-immigration stance. Sabah newspaper's portrayal of these statements as "nonsense" and its emphasis on widespread public backlash indicate the newspaper's opposition to such nationalist and discriminatory rhetoric. This highlights the newspaper's stance favoring social unity and harmony under the theme of nationalism.

As stated before, there was a notable increase in the objection of Sabah's stance towards the ZP and Özdağ after the earthquake. In the article titled *New scandal from Ümit Özdağ! He has started to disseminate images from the PKK's media outlet*¹² published on February 12,

¹⁰ Sabah. (2023, February 10). Ümit Özdağ'dan insanlık dışı sözler! "Önce AK Partililer kurtarılıyor". Sabah. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/02/10/umit-ozdagdan-insanlik-disi-iddia-once-ak-partililer-kurtariliyor>

¹¹ Sabah. (2023, February 11). Suriyeli yalanı ortaya çıkan Özdağ'ın pişkinliği pes dedirtti: "O benden özür dilesin". Sabah. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/02/11/suriyeli-yalani-ortaya-cikan-ozdagin-piskinligi-pes-dedirtti-o-benden-ozur-dilesin>

¹² Sabah. (2023, February 12). Ümit Özdağ'dan yeni skandal! PKK yayın organının görüntülerini servis etmeye başladı. Sabah. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/02/12/umit-ozdagdan-yeni-skandal-pkk-yayin-organinin-goruntulerini-servis-etmeye-basladi>

2023, with the lead of “Attempting to create chaos in society by traveling through the 10 provinces affected by the earthquakes with false claims, ZP Chairman Ümit Özdağ this time turned to the PKK. Özdağ, who started sharing the images from the PKK's media outlet ANF, had to delete his posts, as with his previous false claims, after facing backlash. However, he did not apologize.” When analyzed within the framework of rhetoric and themes, Özdağ's accusations against foreigners and particularly Syrians reflects the anti-immigrant attitudes, and such statements can be evaluated as part of a nationalist approach. The article's refutation of Özdağ's claims and the emphasis on the potential of these claims to incite societal unrest demonstrate Sabah's critical perspective on such nationalist rhetoric and attempts to divide society.

When the article titled *New scandal from Ümit Özdağ! He has started to disseminate images from the PKK's media outlet*¹³ published on 12.02.2023 in Sabah were analyzed within the context of the research themes: Anti-immigration and Nationalism, Commitment to Atatürk's Principles, and Anti-Corruption Measures. It could be seen that the article prominently highlights Özdağ's actions, such as sharing content from PKK's media. In the article, it is noted that Özdağ shared content from ANF, a media outlet supporting the PKK. Although Özdağ removed the content upon realizing its source, Sabah newspaper argues that he shared it intentionally. This situation was portrayed as conflicting with Özdağ's nationalist stance and Sabah suggests that Özdağ's actions, by promoting PKK-related content, contradict his proclaimed nationalist and anti-immigration attitude, thus highlighting an inconsistency within his political stance. Overall, article reflects Sabah's critical stance towards Özdağ's nationalist rhetoric and efforts.

Another example of this is the news article titled *The claim that '600,000 Syrians were taken to Istanbul' has been denied by the Directorate General of Migration Management*¹⁴ published on March 2, 2023. This article continues Sabah's critical tone and stance towards the ZP following the earthquakes. In this piece, the claim by ZP leader Özdağ that 600,000 Syrians were relocated to Istanbul is addressed. The article reports that Özdağ's claims were found to be false and were denied by the Directorate General of Migration Management. The Directorate described these claims as "a new dimension of disinformation and perception management

¹³ Sabah. (2023, February 12). Ümit Özdağ'dan yeni skandal! PKK yayın organının görüntülerini servis etmeye başladı. Sabah. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/02/10/umit-ozdagdan-insanlik-disi-iddia-once-ak-partililer-kurtariliyor>

¹⁴ Sabah. (2023, March 1). 600 bin Suriyeli İstanbul'a götürüldü' iddiasına Göç İdaresi Başkanlığından yalanlama. Sabah. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/03/01/600-bin-suriyeli-istanbula-goturuldu-iddiasina-goc-idaresi-baskanligindan-yananlama>

efforts," condemning Özdağ's statements. Özdağ's assertion about the relocation of 600,000 Syrians to Istanbul reflects a negative attitude towards immigrants and a nationalist approach. Such statements can resonate with segments of society sensitive to nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments, potentially laying the groundwork for social conflict.

After the earthquake, by March 2023, it is observed that Sabah's tone, attitude, and language towards the ZP shifted from a critical to a more neutral, and in some special cases, even positive and supportive stance. For instance, in the article titled *Breaking news: The alliance between Muharrem İnce and Ümit Özdağ has also collapsed!*¹⁵ dated March 4, 2023, the focus is on political alliances and relationships between leaders. The report details the dissolution of the alliance between Özdağ and Muharrem İnce. The breakup is attributed to Özdağ inviting Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavaş to hold a rally, a move deemed disrespectful by İnce. Although not clearly stated, Özdağ's invitation to Yavaş highlights his nationalist stance, given Yavaş's nationalist background and appeal to nationalist voters.

On March 5, 2023, in an article titled *The alliance between the Zafer Party and the Memleket Party has also collapsed! İnce has left the WhatsApp group saying, 'Forgive me.'*¹⁶ it is reported that the alliance between the ZP and the Memleket Party has dissolved. The reason for the dissolution is cited as Özdağ's proposal to nominate Ankara Metropolitan Mayor Mansur Yavaş for the presidency, which was not accepted by Memleket Party Chairman Muharrem İnce. İnce responded to Özdağ's proposal by announcing his withdrawal from the alliance and leaving the WhatsApp group with the message *Please forgive me*. In these articles, it is noted that the situation was reported straightforwardly without any criticism or evaluation directed at the ZP. Thus in this article, the nationalist stance of the ZP can be observed through its inclination towards Mansur Yavaş.

The most intriguing news about the ZP in Sabah was published on March 8, 2023, under the headline *The rent relationship between İYİ Party and CHP: Özdağ revealed dirty laundry: 'Akşener used the municipal resources of CHP.'*¹⁷ This article highlights serious accusations

¹⁵ Sabah. (2024, March 04). Son dakika: Muharrem İnce Ümit Özdağ ittifakı da dağıldı!. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2024/03/04/son-dakika-muharrem-ince-umit-ozdag-ittifaki-da-dagildi>

¹⁶ Sabah. (2023, March 5). Zafer Partisi-Memleket Partisi ittifakı da dağıldı! İnce, 'Hakkınızı helal edin' diyerek WhatsApp grubundan ayrılmış. Sabah. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2023/03/05/zafer-partisi-memleket-partisi-ittifaki-da-dagildi-ince-hakkinizi-helal-edin-diyerek-whatsapp-grubundan-ayrilmis>

¹⁷ Sabah. (2023, March 8). İYİ Parti-CHP arasında rant ilişkisi: Özdağ kirli çamaşırları ortaya döktü: "Akşener CHP'nin belediye kaynaklarını kullandı". Sabah. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2024/03/08/iyi-parti-chp-arasinda-rant-iliskisi-ozdag-kirli-camasirlari-ortaya-doktu-aksener-chpnin-belediye-kaynaklarini-kullandi>

made by ZP's Özdağ against İYİ Party Leader Meral Akşener. Özdağ alleges that Akşener has been using municipal resources from the CHP and obtaining contracts. Additionally, it is claimed that Akşener is working to block Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy. The article explicitly states Özdağ's corruption allegations, asserting that Akşener has profited from using CHP's municipal resources and securing contracts. These allegations strongly emphasize the anti-corruption theme.

When examined within the framework of the themes, these allegations demonstrate that the ZP is critiquing the İYİ Party in line with its anti-corruption rhetoric. Sabah, which generally maintains a pro-government stance and opposes the opposition, presents this story with a tone aimed at putting the opposition in a difficult position by highlighting potential corruption links between İYİ Party and CHP. Notably, this is the first instance where Özdağ's claims are given significant coverage, emphasizing the ZP's stance against corruption. The detailed coverage of these allegations shows the Sabah's tendency to highlight conflicts and accusations within the opposition parties, thereby strengthening the position of the government and the ruling party. This approach by Sabah suggests a strategy to emphasize internal conflicts and corruption allegations within the opposition to bolster the government's and the ruling party's position.

The article published on April 15, 2023, titled *Shock in the Zafer Party... Sarızeybek has withdrawn from candidacy*.¹⁸ highlights a crisis and internal disciplinary issues within the ZP. This reflects the newspaper's critical stance towards the ZP and its tendency to question the internal dynamics of the party. The content and language of the article emphasize issues of trust and leadership within the party, aiming to create a negative perception of the ZP.

Lastly, the article titled *Mass resignation in the Zafer Party! They have joined the MHP*¹⁹ published on April 24, 2023, highlights the resignations from the ZP and the subsequent affiliations with the MHP. This situation underscores the internal issues and trust problems within the ZP, reflecting the newspaper's critical stance and tendency to destabilize the internal dynamics of the ZP. The content and language used in the article state the trust and leadership issues within the ZP, aiming to create a negative perception of the party. When examined within the research themes, this finding points to the permeability of votes and memberships among nationalist ideologies, indicating a trend from the ZP towards the MHP.

¹⁸ Sabah. (2023, April 15). Zafer Partisi'de Sarızeybek şoku... Adaylıktan çekildi. Sabah. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yasam/zafer-partiside-sarizeybek-soku-adayliktan-cekildi-6435746>

¹⁹ Sabah. (2023, April 24). Zafer Partisi'nde toplu istifa! MHP'ye katıldılar. Sabah. Retrieved from <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/zafer-partisinde-toplu-istifa-mhpye-katildilar>

In summary, as indicated in previous sections of the study and based on the conceptual framework behind its inclusion in the research, Sabah was observed to follow a publication line close to the government. In this context, the newspaper's stance towards the ZP is also critical due to the party's opposition status, and it treats ZP and Özdağ together, equating the leader with the party identity in its publications. Especially the political themes attributed to the ZP, such as Anti-immigration and Nationalism, are strongly criticized, with the actions and statements of the ZP in this direction being portrayed as causing social unrest, increasing polarization, and even being associated with fascism. On the other hand, no news was found to be related to the theme of Commitment to Atatürk's Principles during the relevant period. However, the theme of Anti-Corruption Measures was found to be represented in the news in a dual manner. When examining the news that can be inferred under the Anti-Corruption Measures theme, it is seen that Sabah follows a publication line that defends and refutes Özdağ's criticisms of the AKP, while supporting and elevating the ZP's criticisms towards the Millet Alliance.

In the second part of this section, the articles featuring the ZP in Cumhuriyet between January 1, 2023, and May 13, 2023, have been examined. In Table 2 below, the orientations of 42 news articles featuring the ZP in Cumhuriyet were analyzed. According to the findings, it was seen that 5 (11%) of these articles exhibit a negative attitude towards the ZP, 34 (79%) are neutral, and 4 (10%) have a positive attitude. In general, the articles published in the Cumhuriyet is more than the Sabah's publications.

Table 5. Distribution of News Orientations Published in Cumhuriyet Newspaper.

	N	%
Negative	5	11
Neutral	34	79
Positive	4	10
Total	42	100

In Table 3, the distribution of news articles concerning the research themes is presented. When the findings were examined, it was observed that 13 (31%) news articles could be examined within the first research theme of "Anti-immigration and Nationalism," 10 (24%)

articles are related to the second research theme of "Atatürk's Principles," and 7 (17%) articles correspond to the third research theme of "Anti-Corruption Measures."

Table 6. Distribution of Research Themes According to the News Published in Cumhuriyet Newspaper

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Anti – Immigration and Nationalism</i>	13	31
<i>Commitment to Atatürk's Principles</i>	10	24
<i>Anti – Corruption Measures</i>	7	17
<i>Total</i>	30	72

The article titled *The claim that 'they also smuggled ISIS members!' A group protesting Ümit Özdağ has been arrested for human trafficking*²⁰ and dated 04.02.2023 reports on allegations against a group that protested ZP leader Özdağ during his visit to Karkamış following a bombing attack. The group is accused of smuggling individuals, including ISIS terrorists, across the border into Türkiye. When this article reviewed regarding the research themes; the article aligns with the theme of anti-immigration by highlighting allegations that AKP-linked individuals were involved in smuggling ISIS terrorists into Türkiye. This supports the narrative of strict border control and national security, which are central to Özdağ's and the ZP's political stance. Also, the narrative emphasizes the dangers posed by illegal immigration and the potential security threats, reinforcing nationalist sentiments and the need to strengthen immigration policies. In addition, to the elements regarding nationalism and anti-immigration, the article discusses allegations of corruption and misconduct by AKP members, specifically accusing them of being involved in human smuggling operations. This aligns with the theme of anti-corruption, as it exposes potential corrupt practices within the ruling party. The accusations against AKP members for accepting money to facilitate illegal crossings highlight issues of corruption and misuse of power, resonating with the ZP's anti-corruption stance. Overall while

²⁰ Cumhuriyet. (2023, February 4). 'İŞİD'lileri de geçirdiler' iddiası! Ümit Özdağ'ı protesto eden grup insan kaçakçılığından tutuklanmış. Cumhuriyet. https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/isidlileri-de-gecirmisler-umit-ozdagi-protesto-eden-grup-insan-kacakciligindan-tutuklandi-2048007?utm_medium=AramaSonuc&utm_source=AramaSonuc

the Cumhuriyet adopts a critical tone of voice towards to the ruling party, accusing them with the corruption it still maintains a relatively neutral tone in terms of reporting the facts without overtly taking sides.

Another article that was published on 06.04.2023, titled *A major earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş... Ümit Özdağ called on Erdoğan to issue a 'hit order.* ²¹ reports on ZP leader Özdağ's call for a "shoot on sight" order to be issued to the security forces in response to lootings following the devastating earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş. Özdağ's call, directed at President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, highlights concerns over public order and security in the region. When the article was examined regarding the research themes; it could be stated that the ideology of nationalism was subtly present in Özdağ's reaction to the crisis. His call for extreme measures against looters reflects a broader nationalist sentiment that prioritizes the safety and order of the state. While the article does not reflect deeply on anti-immigration sentiments, Özdağ's general political positions suggest a tendency to view internal threats through a nationalist lens when thinking of the area housing a vast amount of immigrants. Again it is seen that the Cumhuriyet adopts a neutral tone reporting Özdağ's statements.

In the article titled *A denial came from his party regarding Ümit Özdağ's 'looting' claim*²² published on February 8, 2023, by Cumhuriyet, the focus was on the internal conflict within the ZP regarding the allegations made by its leader Özdağ. Özdağ claimed that Syrian refugees were looting in Samandağ, but this was contradicted by Suphi Yıldız, the party's Samandağ district chairman. Özdağ has been known for his anti-immigration stance, often vocalizing concerns about the presence and activities of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, his main claim about the looting activities of Syrian refugees in Samandağ fits into this pattern. By asserting that Syrians are responsible for criminal activities, Özdağ reinforces a narrative that portrays immigrants negatively, suggesting that their presence leads to social instability and crime. However different from the other articles published in the Cumhuriyet about the ZP; the article highlights a significant aspect of internal party dynamics. Suphi Yıldız, a local party leader, publicly contradicted Özdağ's claims by stating on social media that there was no such looting activity by Syrians in Samandağ. This internal dissent within the ZP undermines

²¹ Cumhuriyet. (2023, February 6). Kahramanmaraş merkezli büyük deprem... Ümit Özdağ, Erdoğan'a 'vur emri' çağrısı yaptı. Cumhuriyet. https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/kahramanmaraş-merkezli-buyuk-deprem-umit-ozdag-erdogana-vur-emri-cagrisi-yapti-2048905?utm_medium=AramaSonuc&utm_source=AramaSonuc

²² Cumhuriyet. (2023, February 8). Ümit Özdağ'ın 'yağma' iddiasına kendi partisinden yalanlama geldi. Cumhuriyet. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/umit-ozdagin-yagma-iddiasina-kendi-partisinden-yalanlama-geldi-2048905>

Özdağ's credibility and suggests a lack of cohesive communication and agreement within the party ranks.

Cumhuriyet's other article titled *The young man whom Ümit Özdağ referred to as a 'Syrian thief' turned out to be a memorizer (hafez)*.²³ published on February 10, 2023, reports on an incident where Özdağ, falsely accused a young man of being a Syrian thief during the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Kahramanmaraş. This accusation later was proven incorrect as the young man, Abdulkaki Bozdağ, was identified as a Turkish citizen. In this article, Özdağ's claim fits into his well-known anti-immigration and nationalist rhetoric. By accusing a supposed Syrian refugee of theft during a crisis, Özdağ attempted to reinforce a narrative that immigrants contribute to lawlessness and societal problems. Furthermore, this situation reflects how nationalist sentiments can be leveraged to stigmatize immigrant communities, increasing tensions and prejudices. Similar to the Sabah's tone of voice this article published in Cumhuriyet critically examines Özdağ's false accusation and its ramifications. By highlighting the factual corrections and the impact on public perception, the article underscores the dangers of nationalist rhetoric and the importance of accurate information in fostering societal harmony.

Following the earthquake, the article titled *Ümit Özdağ's response to the remarks that made the agenda: 'Fuat Oktay is written, but read as if we wouldn't be ashamed'*.²⁴ published in Cumhuriyet Newspaper on February 12, 2023, includes criticisms by ZP Chairman Ümit Özdağ directed at the AKP Vice President Fuat Oktay, which can be interpreted in a harsh tone. Özdağ shared Oktay's statement that he made after the 5.8 magnitude earthquake in Silivri in 2019, accusing Oktay and the government of being inadequate in earthquake readiness. When the subtexts of the article are examined, it is stated that Özdağ's criticisms of the government regarding corruption and mismanagement were presented. Specifically, Özdağ's reference to Oktay's statement highlights the government's involvement in corruption and the deficiencies in earthquake preparedness, aligning with one of the themes of this research, Anti-Corruption.

In the article titled *Written by Fatih Altaylı: Ümit Özdağ's candidate is Muharrem İnce*.²⁵ published on February 28, 2023, statements and evaluations regarding the political roadmap

²³ Cumhuriyet. (2023, February 10). Ümit Özdağ'ın 'Suriyeli hırsız' dediği genç hafız çıktı. Cumhuriyet. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/umit-ozdagin-suriyeli-hirsiz-dedigi-genc-hafiz-cikti-2048905>

²⁴ Cumhuriyet. (2023, February 12). Gündem olan sözlerine Ümit Özdağ'dan tepki: Fuat Oktay yazılır, utanmazlık diye okunur. Retrieved from <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/gundem-olan-sozlerine-umit-ozdagdan-tepki-fuat-oktay-yazilir-utanmazdik-diye-okunur-2050997>

²⁵ Cumhuriyet. (2023, February 28). Fatih Altaylı yazdı: Ümit Özdağ'ın adayı Muharrem İnce. Cumhuriyet. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/fatih-altayli-yazdi-umit-ozdagin-adayi-muharrem-ince-2056211>

of Özdağ were given. According to the article, it was highlighted that the ZP could form an alliance with the Homeland Party (Memleket Partisi) and that their candidate might be Muharrem İnce. Evaluations by Fatih Altaylı were also mentioned. However, in one of the subtexts of the article, it was noted that Özdağ would support Mansur Yavaş if he was nominated by the Millet Alliance. This assessment was indicated to be in line with the ZP's nationalist stance, as Mansur Yavaş's nationalist orientation aligns with the ideology of the ZP.

In the article titled “Mass Resignation in the Leadership of the ZP: 'Divisive Rhetoric Has Deeply Affected Those Who Support Us,”²⁶ published on March 7, 2023, by Cumhuriyet Newspaper, a critical tone was used, differing from previously published reports. It was reported that several senior officials of the ZP cooperatively resigned. Also, article includes severe criticisms of the party's political style, political stance, and the leadership behavior of Özdağ. The statements of the resigning members were included, reporting that the party's divisive and polarizing rhetoric negatively affected target voters. Additionally, it was claimed that the party deviated from democratic standards and was being managed like a private business. When the article were evaluated within the framework of research themes, the statements of the resigning members indicating a departure from a political style aligned with Atatürk's principles and the adoption of a polarizing rhetoric are aspects that conflict with the party's stance.

One of the most important news articles about the ZP in Cumhuriyet was the article titled *it was announced by Ümit Özdağ... The ATA Alliance's presidential candidate nominee Sinan Oğan makes his first statement.* published on March 11, 2023. This article mainly covers the first statements made by Sinan Oğan, the presidential candidate supported by the Ata Alliance, of which the ZP is a part, in the 2023 elections. When examined within the research themes, the nationalist stance of the ZP and the Ata Alliance could be seen. Specifically, Sinan Oğan's statement, "The Turkish nation is not helpless against two alliances," and his words, "You will either accept 13 million refugees or come and walk with us," directly reflect the ZP's nationalist and anti-immigration stance. Additionally, his statement "Everything is for Turkish" reflects the alliance's nationalist identity. Furthermore, Özdağ's remarks emphasize that the ZP and the Ata Alliance will progress based on the founding philosophy of the Republic and that they aim to rebuild the state established by Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. These

²⁶ Cumhuriyet. (2023, March 7). Zafer Partisi yönetiminde toplu istifa: 'Kutuplaştırıcı üslup bize gönül verenleri derinden etkilemiştir'. Cumhuriyet. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/zafer-partisi-yonetiminde-toplu-istifa-kutuplastirici-uslup-bize-gonul-verenleri-derinden-etkilemistir-2057324>

statements show the party's commitment to Atatürk's principles and the second research theme. Lastly, the article highlights the ZP's stance against corruption and bureaucratic deterioration. Özdağ's statement, "We promise to stop the plundering and looting order and hold the criminals accountable," directly refers to the party's stance against corruption. In summary, this article is one of the clearest representations of the ZP's political stance.

An important article featured in Cumhuriyet on March 15, 2023, titled *Ümit Özdağ criticizes the People's Alliance over 'HÜDA PAR': 'It has turned into a hogtie alliance.'*²⁷ stands out as another significant piece of evidence. This article discusses the political implications of HÜDA PAR's inclusion in the Cumhur Alliance. It highlights Ümit Özdağ's numerous sharp criticisms directed at the Cumhur Alliance. For instance, Özdağ asserts that the alliance has transformed into a "hogtie alliance" with the inclusion of HÜDA PAR, a party he describes as being opposed to the secular regime. When examined within the research themes, Özdağ and Sinan Oğan's statements reflect the nationalist stance of the ZP and the ATA Alliance. Özdağ indicates that HÜDA PAR and the HDP harm Turkish nationalism, while Oğan emphasizes that Turkish nationalists and Atatürk supporters will be the determining factor in the election. These statements underscore the ZP's nationalist and anti-immigration stance. Additionally, Özdağ's explicit declaration of allegiance to Atatürk's principles, the secular republican regime, and the unitary state system precisely aligns with the second theme of the research. In summary, the primary significance of this article lies in its extensive coverage of the ZP's criticisms and strategic moves against the Cumhur Alliance, while maintaining an impartial narrative and providing detailed accounts.

On April 9, 2023, Cumhuriyet newspaper published an important and detailed article titled *Ümit Özdağ announced his party's election manifesto.*²⁸ regarding the ZP's election strategy and promises. Within the context of the research themes, the manifesto strongly emphasizes the necessity of repatriating refugees and illegal immigrants in Türkiye. Özdağ explicitly stated that the ZP's anti-immigrant stance involves sending back 13 million refugees within a year, even forcibly if necessary. This clearly reflects the party's nationalist stance and sensitivity towards preserving Türkiye's demographic structure. Furthermore, Özdağ highlighted in the manifesto that they would adhere to Atatürk's principles and the founding

²⁷ Cumhuriyet. (2023, March 15). Ümit Özdağ'dan Cumhur İttifakı'na 'HÜDA PAR' eleştirisi: Domuz bağı ittifakına dönüştü. Cumhuriyet. Retrieved from <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/umit-ozdagdan-cumhur-ittifakina-huda-par-elestirisi-domuz-bagi-ittifakina-donustu-2061435>

²⁸ Cumhuriyet. (2023, April 9). Ümit Özdağ, partisinin seçim manifestosunu açıkladı. Retrieved from <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/umit-ozdag-partisinin-secim-manifestosunu-acikladi-2069610>.

philosophy of the republic, asserting that Türkiye would remain a national, unitary, and secular state. Also Özdağ promised that the first four articles of the Constitution would not be changed and that the fundamental values of the Republic would be preserved. This is a clear expression of the second theme of the research, which is adherence to Atatürk's principles. Lastly, the manifesto also addressed issues of combating corruption and ensuring transparent governance. It was stated that the Türkiye Wealth Fund would be closed, TİKA's expenditures would be halted, and public resources would be used more effectively. Özdağ's statement, "We promise to stop the plundering and looting order and to hold the criminals accountable," demonstrates the party's commitment to fighting corruption. In summary, when the article is evaluated overall, it presents the ZP's election vision and policies comprehensively to the readers in a neutral yet detailed manner, emphasizing the party's political and social stance.

In addition, the article titled *Ümit Özdağ's statement on 'refugees': 'We will send them back by force if necessary'* published on April 12, 2023, clearly shows the anti-refugee stance of the ZP to its readers. The article comprehensively addresses the ZP's commitment to Atatürk's principles and its anti-immigration position. Özdağ's statements clearly reflect the party's ideological stance and political priorities. Even in the article titled *Ümit Özdağ announced his 'solution' for Türkiye to overcome the economic crisis*³⁰ ZP addresses the economic problems caused due to uncontrolled immigration and with the repatriating of the immigrants Özdağ states that the Turkish Economy will be recover.

When evaluating the news articles about the ZP in Cumhuriyet Newspaper from a general perspective, it is observed that the principle of impartiality is maintained in the reporting. However, it is noteworthy that while the news extensively covers the ZP's criticisms of the ruling party and its ally, the Cumhur Alliance, the articles criticizing the Millet Alliance or expressing the ZP's political stance do not receive the same extensive coverage. Additionally, the research themes are prominently reflected in the news articles, particularly nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments. The commitment to Atatürk's principles, which aligns with Cumhuriyet Newspaper's publishing principles, is also distinctly emphasized. As a result, while

²⁹ Cumhuriyet. (2023, April 12). Ümit Özdağ'dan 'sığınmacı' çıkışı: Gerekirse zorla yollayacağız. Retrieved from <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/umit-ozdagdan-siginmaci-cikisi-gerekirse-zorla-yollayacagiz-2069610>.

³⁰ Cumhuriyet. (2023, April 13). Ümit Özdağ, Türkiye'nin ekonomik krizi aşması için çözümü açıkladı. Cumhuriyet. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/umit-ozdag-turkiyenin-ekonomik-krizi-asmasi-icin-cozumu-acikladi-2071077>

Cumhuriyet Newspaper generally adheres to the principle of impartiality in its coverage of ZP, the scope and focus of the news seem to be shaped by editorial preferences.



6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the emergence and impact of the Zafer Party (ZP) on Turkish politics, with a specific focus on its discourse in the 2023 general elections. Within the scope of this research, the position of the Zafer Party in the Turkish political environment was examined within the framework of the discourse and actions of the Zafer Party. In this context, the main literature was posinieted on the history of Turkish politics and the rise of far-right populism globally as well as in Türkiye.

To remind the readers of literature, populism, and nationalism often appear intertwined. Populism is frequently driven by crises, disasters, and significant events that serve as catalysts, sparking populist movements and marking their points of origin. Economic issues, in particular, are major triggers, as they expose underlying societal challenges and create a chain reaction. Nationalism, closely linked to populism, is often a core component, emphasizing a commitment to the 'nation' and acting as a potent driver of populist sentiments.

Through the flow, I listed some key roles of far-right parties to position the Zafer Party within Turkish politics. Key elements of this movement include charismatic leadership, anti-immigrant actions, nationalism, internal uniformity, and conspiracy theories.

When examining the history and current state of the far-right in Türkiye, both similarities and differences with Europe emerge. While Islamophobia plays a significant role in the impact of migration on the rise of the far-right in Europe, in Türkiye, cultural and economic factors are more influential. Particularly following the Syrian civil war, the government's open-door policy, coupled with narratives of "religious brotherhood" and "host and guest," created an environment of acceptance towards migrants until the economic downturn and contraction in 2018. However, the currency crises of 2018 and the subsequent economic contraction revealed that these narratives were no longer accepted by society, and a negative perception of refugees began to dominate.

These dynamics became clearer than ever before when the general election held on May 14, 2023, is examined. A total of 24 political parties participated within the framework of three alliances, with seven parties securing seats in parliament. According to the election results, the Cumhur Alliance, consisting of the AKP, MHP, and YRP, won the majority with 323 deputies,

while the Nation Alliance, comprising the CHP and İYİ Party, became the main opposition with 212 deputies. Finally, the Labor and Freedom Alliance, including the YSGP and TİP, secured 65 seats in the opposition. At this point, the Zafer Party led by Ümit Özdağ, has emerged as a significant force in Turkish politics in this election, particularly influencing the discourse around immigration and nationalism in the context of far-right populism. Established in 2021, the party quickly gained attention for its hardline stance on immigration and its commitment to Turkish nationalism. The 2023 presidential election highlighted the Zafer Party's growing influence, as it managed to shape the political agenda and force other parties to address immigration issues more directly. Ümit Özdağ's anti-immigration rhetoric has been a central pillar of the Zafer Party's platform.

For the purposes of this study, I asked how the party's political strategies and ideology contributed to Türkiye's political environment during the 2023 electoral campaign. On the one hand, based on the party manifesto it clearly can be seen that party ideology mainly focuses on Anti-immigrant discourse, commitment to Atatürk's principles and traditional values, and nationalism. More specifically, the party's political strategies during this period were driven by two main factors: economic conditions and anti-immigrant, ultra-nationalist discourse. This influence is evident in the party's manifesto, rally recordings, and, most notably, in news coverage, demonstrating a substantial impact on opposition parties and alliances. For example, as the opposition alliance failed to secure a majority in the first round of the 2023 elections and trailed President Erdoğan by 4.5 points heading into the second round, there was a notable shift toward more nationalist rhetoric. In response, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the opposition candidate, adjusted his campaign strategy in the second round to appeal more to nationalist sentiments. Notably, in the second round of the general election, opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu echoed this sentiment, stating, *we will send our Syrian brothers back to their country in peace*³¹. The Nation Alliance, by garnering support from the Zafer Party, particularly emphasized its stance against immigration. Kılıçdaroğlu formed an alliance with ZP leader Ümit Özdağ, reportedly offering him the position of Interior Minister. In summary, the 2023 elections were marked by alliances and agendas centered around nationalism and immigration. The shift to a presidential system facilitated the emergence of various political alliances that prioritized issues like immigration, creating significant opportunities for smaller parties. This illustrates that the

³¹ The news related opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, <https://chp.org.tr/haberler/chp-lideri-kilicdaroglu-suriyeli-kardeslerimizi-huzur-icinde-kendi-ulkelerine-gonderecegiz> , 14.10.2025

ZP not only positioned its policy on the anti-immigrant issue but also shaped the political environment of the election.

The second focus of this study is to examine whether the party's discourse aligns with the characteristics of far-right populism. When key themes associated with far-right ideologies such as, anti-immigration policies, nationalism, and internal uniformity are considered, there appears to be a notable alignment with the themes explored in this thesis. Specifically, the emphasis on anti-immigration and nationalism, along with the presence of a charismatic leader, strongly suggests that the party fulfills these qualifications. This is not only criteria that the party fulfills qualifications but also the manifesto clearly shows the main themes of the research. The manifesto, which is open-minded and challenging, appeals strongly to national sentiments and has many references to the foundation of the Republic. From a thematic perspective, the manifesto is characterized by a strong opposition to immigration and Turkish nationalism. As a result, the ZP's manifesto combines nationalist ideology and pragmatic policy proposals. Its content and language are a tool for political mobilization and persuasion, and resonate deeply with voters who prioritize anti-immigration rhetoric, commitment to Atatürk's principles, and anti-corruption measures. This is one of the important similarities especially in European countries, where the rise of the radical right and far-right has closely paralleled waves of migration

Another cornerstone of this study is understanding how the ZP's discourse contributed to Turkish nationalism during the 2023 electoral campaign. Nationalist discourse evolves depending on the sociopolitical context, and this was also evident in Türkiye. In the lead-up to the 2023 general election, the focus of nationalist sentiment shifted towards a more ultra-nationalist orientation. To be more specific, the findings indicate that the news analyzed through this process in both Sabah and Cumhuriyet primarily relates to the themes of anti-immigration and nationalism.

Table 7. Comparison of findings based on themes

Research Themes	Group of themes	Newspapers		Youtube Recordings	Manifesto
		Sabah	Cumhuriyet		
<i>1.Anti – Immigration and Nationalism</i>	Emphasis on National Identity and Sovereignty	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Focus on Migration as a Central Issue	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Populist and Nationalist Rhetoric	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Security and Defense Concerns	✓	✓	✗	✓
<i>2.Commitment to Atatürk's Principles</i>	Historical and Cultural References	✗	✓	✓	✓
<i>3.Anti – Corruption Measures</i>	Economic Protectionism	✓	✓	✗	✓
	Criticism of Current Political Leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓

According to the findings, out of 29 news articles related to the party published by Sabah, only 15 of them, accounting for 52 percent, primarily focus on the aforementioned themes. And most of the news from the section employs a particularly harsh and at times derogatory tone towards the ZP, demonstrating an aggressive stance. This hostility becomes more pronounced when the ZP criticizes the government or engages in electoral activities against it, while at times the newspaper even expresses support.

In summary, Sabah's portrayal of the ZP is highly critical when it challenges the government, yet neutral or favorable when it targets the opposition. In contrast, Cumhuriyet, out of 42 news articles related to the party published, only 30 of them, accounting for 72

percent generally adopt a neutral approach toward the ZP, adhering to the journalistic principle of impartiality, and reports on events without commentary. However, a notable difference is that *Cumhuriyet* publishes a significantly higher volume of articles highlighting the weaknesses, resignations, and negative aspects within the ZP, which subtly and overtly suggests that the party's functionality is problematic. On the other hand, quantitative content analysis is primarily employed for both *Cumhuriyet* and *Sabah* newspapers to categorize the prevailing themes. When the themes are examined in depth, it becomes evident that the topics of anti-immigration and nationalism are more prominently featured, compared to themes such as commitment to Atatürk's principles and anti-corruption efforts. It shows that through this process ZP put nationalist discourse more about patriotism, anti-immigrant, and internal uniformity form. According to the findings, the party's manifesto envisions the return of 13 million refugees within one year, reflecting a priority on national homogeneity and sovereignty. This stance is frequently reinforced through historical references. Additionally, the manifesto emphasizes the economic burden posed by immigrants and asserts that their separation from Turkish society is essential for achieving economic stability. Findings from YouTube rally recordings further highlight the party's framing of immigrants as an unavoidable economic burden. On the other hand, an analysis of newspaper coverage shows that both *Sabah* and *Cumhuriyet* within the specified time frame presented the party in predominantly negative or neutral tones, particularly concerning themes of anti-immigration and nationalism. In conclusion, the Zafer Party has strategically positioned itself based on an anti-immigration discourse. Returning to the research question, the party views immigrants as an economic burden that must be addressed by ensuring their prompt repatriation.

The policy implications of this thesis, based on its findings, suggest that policymakers should focus directly on addressing immigration issues. Regardless of whether immigrants are accepted or not, they are already an integral part of society, and the idea of repatriating them within a year appears unfeasible. Therefore, policymakers should prioritize strategies for integrating immigrants into society while actively working to prevent discrimination against them.

More importantly, given that this issue is likely to dominate Türkiye's political agenda in the near future, I believe that establishing a dedicated ministry to address and manage immigration-related challenges effectively is essential for facilitating the integration of migrants into society and implementing relevant policies

As this is a specific case study focusing on a single party, I was unable to comprehensively measure voter behavior. Furthermore, due to time constraints and, more importantly, for the sake of efficiency, I could not review all newspapers or conduct a thorough thematic analysis across them. Additionally, this study does not focus on the party's charismatic leadership either. Therefore, future studies may address these limitations. Additionally, I believe that comparative studies on political parties could significantly contribute to the literature. Lastly, I argue that the Zafer Party not only developed a far-right populist discourse but also clearly influenced the broader Turkish political landscape. I believe that, soon, Turkish political life may witness the emergence of new political parties adopting similar political attitudes to those of far-right politics.



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