



MAGYC
Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Formal and Informal Dimensions of Turkish Migration Governance: Linkages between Domestic and Transnational Politics

Samet Apaydin
Meltem Muftuler-Bac
Sabanci University

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Lead authors:

Samet Apaydin, Sabanci University
Meltem Muftuler-Bac, Sabanci University

Principal reviewers:

Hélène Thiollet, Sciences Po
Fiona Adamson, SOAS University of London

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MAGYC WORKING PAPER

Abstract

This paper brings an alternative explanation to the political repercussions of what is known as the Syrian refugee crisis. Most studies that analyse the Turkish case conclude that mass refugee influx across several years did not affect the voting behavior of citizens substantially. By contrast, this paper supports previous studies on immigration in the European countries which demonstrate that governments are severely punished due to their failure in controlling cross-border movements by examining the effect of refugee arrivals on the voting behavior of local citizens in Turkey. However, it also shows that the punishment mechanism might not be uniform across a country's territory. Borrowing from the studies on spatial proximity and border, this paper argues that geographical proximity to the Syrian border mitigates the negative electoral effect of refugees' arrivals and settlement: anti-immigrant voting behaviours are less salient in border regions. We hypothesise that the salience of security issues alongside the border triggers 'a rally-round-the flag' effect and cultural-similarities with the refugees prevent anti-immigrant sentiments in the border-cities. Consequently, local citizens in border cities are more likely to continue their support for the government's party (AKP) in elections. This paper challenges the one-size-fits-all approach in studies on immigration impact on domestic politics. We show that although right wing anti-immigrant parties did rise overall since the Syrian refugee crisis, electoral impact of refugee flow varies greatly across localities. The Republican People's Party (CHP)'s stance on restrictive immigration policies since the eruption of the Syrian civil war led to an increase in its vote share. Utilizing the vote shares of AKP and CHP in the electoral-district level, this paper empirically diagnoses that there is an increase in CHP's vote share, especially in the large cities, which might be related partly to their anti-immigrant sentiments. Yet, large refugee receiving border regions experience a relatively less important rise in CHP vote share. This paper provides a perspective on how domestic and transnational politics resonate with the electorate behaviour on the issue of migration.

Introduction

The Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War had serious consequences for international politics such as the informal establishment of alliances, the break-up of close relationships, and new debates on international organizations' effectiveness. Yet these international consequences may not directly infiltrate the daily lives of citizens. However, there is a significant consequence which stands out for its effects on international politics as it has ubiquitously spread to the Western hemisphere and is still an issue of major contention in global governance. As the problem remains unresolved, more citizens seem to feel discontented with their decision-makers.

The turmoil in the region since 2011 caused the displacement of more than 26 million people.¹ The intensity of the displacement was such that the world has been witnessing the most drastic and unprecedented refugee influx in recent years. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, depicts the situation as follows: "*Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world.*"² While governments are busy trying to stop or at least control cross-border movements of the millions of refugees, a wide variety of non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, and International Federation of Red Cross, and Red Crescent Societies emphasize the atrocities that refugees suffer. Once those refugees are settled into the host countries, another critical phase of the policy process starts: integration. Despite not being invited to the policy-making process, the lives of local citizens change drastically as an outcome of this integration process.

The places where refugees settled have undergone a period of transition in the way that local citizens become more aware of the presence of an outgroup. Despite a few existing counterexamples, the transition process includes trends such as increasing crime rates (Pinotti 2017; Piopiunik and Ruhose 2017), increasing house prices (Saiz 2007; Tumen 2016) or decreasing internal migration (Borjas 2006). The economic and redistributive factors for anti-immigrant attitudes are only part of the debate. Socio-psychological factors such as cultural consideration and prejudices also play a significant role. For instance, interactions with immigrants trigger group biases. Enos (2017) describes how coming across an immigrant increases an individual's salience of group identity. As the number of refugees increases, salience scales up and reaches a level where the individual starts to identify refugees as 'others' or 'foreigners'. On other hand, earlier studies emphasize how the local stock of

¹ Figure at a Glance, The UN Refugees Agency, June 18, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

² Syria Conflict At 5 Years: The Biggest Refugee and Displacement Crisis of Our Time Demands A Huge Surge In Solidarity, The UN Refugees Agency, March 15, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/3/56e6e3249/syria-conflict-5-years-biggest-refugee-displacement-crisis-time-demands.html>

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immigrants and refugees cannot fully predict the citizens' attitudes and political preferences, but perceptions also matter (Rustenbach 2010). When politicians, particularly the populist and anti-immigrants, exaggerate arrival and integration problems, the refugee issue becomes even more politicized, and citizens become more supportive of restrictive policies (Hopkins 2010). For citizens of democracies, the best viable way to express their policy preferences and affect the decision-making process is by popular voting.

This paper's research question focuses on the question of whether voting behavior of local citizens is prone to change once they are exposed to refugees and if so, to what extent. Existing studies support that the presence and influx of immigrants are one of the main reasons for increases in the vote share of extreme-right parties (Barone et al. 2016; Dinas et al. 2019; Dustman, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016). Extreme-right parties seem appealing to local citizens because of their frame on restrictive immigration policies (Arzheimer 2009; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002). Considering that Turkey is now hosting the world's largest refugee community, it is a fertile ground for analysing the relationship and to check the validity of this theory. As of 2020, Turkey is hosting more than 4.1 million refugees, while the second-ranked country is merely hosting 1.6 million refugees.³ At the same time, Turkey hosts more refugees than the total amount of all European countries put together.

Almost all previous studies utilize the European countries as examples where the refugee crisis led to political conflicts. Testing the validity of the theory outside of Europe should not be problematic because the explanatory power of the theory does not come from any particular characteristics of the European countries, such as the failure of the European Union in managing the cross-border movement. The theoretical framework is based on the premise of how citizens, who bear economic and cultural costs due to the increasing number of immigrants, reveal their discontent to the national governments through prioritizing a relatively more restrictive party with regards to cross-border movement. None of the studies have tested the same argument for the European Parliament elections, where repercussions of the refugee crisis might be distinguishable at other levels on top of the national level. Taking these premises into account, several studies tested the same theoretical arguments in the Turkish context but conclude that the refugee crisis has not played a crucial role in shaping the voting decisions of the citizens (Altindag and Kaushal 2021; Fisunoglu and Sert 2019). These findings are intriguing and worthwhile to conduct further research since refugees constitute one of the fiercest debates in Turkish politics (Apaydin and Muftuler-Bac, 2021).

Accordingly, the main research question of this paper is whether and, to what extent, voting behavior of local citizens changes once they are exposed to refugees. Furthermore, this paper assesses whether and to what extent this

³ Figure at a Glance, The UN Refugees Agency, June 18, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

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change in voting behavior is related to the geographical distance to the Syrian border, where security concerns and cultural similarities play a mitigating role for the negative effect of refugees. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that we do not explicitly analyse the possible factors which mitigate the negative effects of refugees on voting behavior. The main contribution of this paper is built on the idea that spatial proximity, in this case, distance to the Syrian border, plays a key role in shaping the voting decisions of local citizens as a reaction to the refugee crisis.

This paper exploits quasi-natural experimental settings in Turkey by utilizing electoral-district level data, with initial findings suggesting that citizens who reside closer to the border are less likely to punish the government, probably because of the salience of security issues or cultural similarities. On the contrary, while increasing the refugee ratio has increased the main opposition party's (The Republican People's Party, *CHP*) vote share, the decision to support the opposition party is amplified as the distance to the Syrian border increases. Our findings indicate that the main opposition party has filled the void created by the absence of an anti-immigrant party in Turkey. However, in border cities where security concerns outweigh the refugee crisis, local citizens continue to support or at least do not punish the incumbent party, the AKP (Justice and Development Party). Utilizing Turkish electoral data to empirically support these conclusions, this paper sheds light on how the domestic and transnational dynamics are interlinked on the migration issue.

The organization of the paper is as follows: The next section provides a literature review introducing the main theoretical framework for the paper with a focus on the results of these studies on the relationship between refugees and voting behaviour, a key aspect of the linkages between domestic and transnational politics. We have two main hypotheses based on this theoretical framework, which are then tested using electoral-district level electoral results. We discuss our main findings for Turkish electoral dynamics in line with domestic and transnational linkages, through an analysis of Turkish politics and the presence of Syrian refugees as a factor shaping Turkish political behaviour. Our paper contributes to this discussion on the interlinkages between domestic and transnational politics by demonstrating the impacts of the Syrian refugees on Turkish electorate behaviour.

Theoretical Framework: Linkages between Domestic and Transnational Dynamics

A considerable number of scholars, whose studies are collectively referred to as group conflict, argue that increasing contact with outside groups leads to fierce competition including but not limited to ideological and material concerns (LeVine and Campbell, 1972). On the other hand, other studies claim that as the contact increases, the positive information with regards to outside groups enhances and the prejudices towards those people decrease (Allport, 1954). Due to the unprecedented refugee influx to the European peninsula

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with the turmoil in the MENA region; second and relatedly, with the increasing prominence and popularity of anti-immigrant as well as extreme-right parties across all European countries, there is an increasing focus on the effects of immigrants on voting behaviour.

Previous studies on immigrants use survey data to explain the effect of immigrants on individual political behavior. One of the advantages of surveys on immigration is its ability to measure individual attitudes towards immigrants. A similar type of measurement can only be approximated at the aggregate level and the results would not be as accurate. Multiple studies have examined this association between attitudes toward immigrants and voting for extreme-right parties (Arzheimer 2009). The findings of these studies suggest that the marginal effect of attitudes towards immigration on voting for extreme-right parties is positive; yet this effect is also conditional on factors such as unemployment. The outcomes were not surprising considering the extensive literature on how anti-immigrant attitudes are shaped by the economic considerations of the local citizens (Mayda 2005; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006).

These economic concerns shaping anti-immigrant attitudes are only one side of the coin. Following the classification of Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014), the other side of the coin is composed of socio-psychological factors such as cultural consideration and prejudices. Socio-psychological factors find more empirical support compared to economic ones (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 225), scholars continue to emphasize the importance of redistributive factors (Alesina, Murard, and Rapoport 2019). For example, Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner (2016) examine the relationship between socio-psychological factors and immigrants using a survey on sociotropic evaluations of asylum seekers by 18000 eligible voters in 15 European countries, where certain characteristics of asylum seekers are indicative of public preferences. Asylum seekers who have higher employability, more consistent testimonies and severe vulnerabilities are associated face more positive public attitudes (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016, 217). These attitudes do not significantly differ for varying individual characteristics such as ideology, education level, and income, which in return suggest a wider consensus on the type of asylum seekers that citizens prefer (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016, 218).

The question as to whether and to what extent, the voting behavior of local citizens inclines to change once they are exposed to immigrants poses a challenge. What makes it even more challenging is the uncertainty about the direction and the extent of the effect. Similar to Turkey, Greece and Italy have been the primary point for mass refugee influx due to their geographical locations. In Greece, various studies revealed that the massive arrival of refugees to the Greek islands benefited the Golden Dawn, known for its harsh stance on immigrants (Dinas et. al. 2019; Vasilakis 2018). The Greek citizens living in the Greek islands exhibited hostility toward refugees as the massive unauthorized arrivals have continued (Hangartner et al. 2019). The exploitation

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of the mass arrivals by anti-immigrant parties is not particular to the Greek case. Though experiencing a relatively less intense crisis, the vote shares of anti-immigrant parties in Italy (particularly Lega Nord) are correlated with the number of refugees (Barone et al.; Campo, Guinti, and Mendola 2021). Multiple studies emphasize how the presence of refugees, even in short term, is associated with anti-immigrant sentiments that in return is translated into electoral decisions in other European countries: such as Hungary (Gess, Toth, and Wachs 2021), Denmark (Dustmann, Valsijeva, and Damm 2016), and France (Edo 2019). On the other hand, the varying extent of these causal effects on rural and urban settlements (Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016) or on radical and moderate voters in settlements (Adkisson and Peach 2018) further complicates these findings. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that each of these studies test their hypotheses in a single country without controlling their generalizability to other countries. Almost none of them utilizes the same measurement unit for refugees, let alone the same method or model. Yet, those differences do not indicate a criticism but rather a possible explanation of their confronting results. After all, being exposed to refugees affects citizens' voting behavior and this effect is conditional on proximity to certain events or places.

In the Turkish case, however, unlike the other cases, Syrian refugees have been mostly discussed from different perspectives rather than voting behaviour. Only a few studies focus on the consequences of Syrian refugees on the individual determinants. For example, Altındağ and Kaushal (2021) and Fisunoğlu and Sert (2019) analyze the electoral consequences of refugees and concluded that Syrian refugees did not have a significant effect on the voting behavior of local citizens. The majority of the studies in the Turkish case either focus on the issue within wider Turkish politics and Turkish foreign policy or from the perspectives of Syrian refugees and discrimination towards them. Thus, this paper aims to fill this gap in the literature by differentiating the effect of refugees, conditional on the distance to the Syrian border, on electoral behaviour in Turkey in order to assess the domestic and transnational linkages.

Borders are considered an indispensable part of international politics. On the one hand, the vast literature on political geography seeks to explain how borders are shaped over time (Gottman 1952); on the other hand, the majority of the studies focuses on what borders represent both internationally (Ruggie 1993) and in the minds of individuals (Newman and Paasi 1998). What makes borders play a critical role in international politics is the idea of a triple function of borders—demarcating state territory, public authority, and the 'nation' (Del Sarto 2010, 149). Nevertheless, despite defining the boundaries of states' sovereignty, borders do not divide cultural, economic, or social relations between two states. Putting more delicately: “[borders are] *zones rather than lines*” (Hansen 1981, 19).

The lives in border cities are different: *“Of necessity, border landers have developed their own way of life and their own institutions. A sense of*

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"otherness" and "separateness" is clearly detectable among people who live in the binational urban centres..." (Martinez 1996, 19). Proximity to borders is a matter of inquiry. Taking into account various studies on borders and geographical distance, it is not surprising to expect that all different characteristics of border cities should affect the political decisions of individuals. Adkisson and Peach (1999) investigated the border effect on voting behaviour with an analysis of the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections in the U.S, by looking at 360 counties in four Mexican border states and concluded that there is a border effect that prioritizes the Democratic candidate, and also that effect extends beyond the immediate border regions. Adkisson and Peach (1999)'s study was rudimentary in terms of their data and model estimations. When Adkisson and Saucedo (2011)'s paper tested the same hypotheses with more detailed data using sophisticated model, they were able to demonstrate that citizens in border regions give Democratic presidential candidates approximately a four-percentage point higher margin over their Republican rivals (Adkisson and Saucedo 2011). Adkisson and Saucedo (2011) point out that local citizens who live in border region favour Democratic candidates and argue that "*Obviously both parties are concerned about illegal immigration but, at least these brief passages, suggest softer rhetoric coming from the Democratic Party. Perhaps a bit of the Democratic favouring border effect comes from a closer alignment between border resident sentiments towards immigration and a softer sounding Democratic rhetoric*" (Adkisson and Saucedo 2011, 280).

It seems that the effect of immigrants on voting behavior has received substantial scholarly attention (Barone et al. 2016; Dinas et al. 2019; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016; Edo et al. 2019; Steinmayr 2016; Vertier and Viskanic 2019). Most of the attention has focused on similar theoretical issues, namely public choice theory along with competing theories of social identity, group contact, and group conflict. For example, citizens consider their economic well-being such that they vote for a candidate/party which will maximize their economic opportunities (Mueller 2003). Similarly, studies on economic voting argue that citizens tend to support a candidate/party which will likely bring economic gains (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981).

Equally important as material concerns driven by economic considerations, being exposed to an influx of refugees might trigger cultural sentiments among the local citizens as well. Both social identity and group conflict theories argue that the inclusion of outside groups into daily lives increases prejudice, fear, and hatred towards those groups (Allport 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). Similarly, group contact theory also suggests that increasing perceptions of immigrants as threats with the increase in contact (Quillian 1995; Sidanius and Pratto 2001; Lahav 2004). However, contact theory suggests that these perceptions might be mitigated by increased social contacts. Similarly, Enos (2017, 67) argues that outgroup attitudes are shaped through proximity between local people and immigrants, "*...because proximity increases the salience of categorizations and this increased salience increases the*

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perceived difference between groups, as groups become closer in geographic space, the perceived difference- the psychological space between us- becomes larger." Studies examining the effects of immigrants on voting behaviour concluded that an influx of refugees increases the vote share of the extreme-right parties (Dinas et al. 2019; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016;), except for few, which concluded the opposite trend (Steinmayr 2016).

When these frameworks are projected onto the Turkish case, there are both material and ideational factors shaping the citizens' attitudes towards the Syrians. For example, in Turkey, the influx of particularly unskilled refugees created an informal labour market as these refugees were willing to work for lower wages compared to the Turkish labourers (Balkan and Tumen 2016). Furthermore, Altindag and Kaushal (2019, 4) showed how the government's welfare programs towards the Syrian refugees provoked local citizens. Consequently, citizens are more likely to punish the incumbent as a reaction to the influx of refugees if they perceive the refugees are economically costly. As for ideational based concerns, in Turkey, citizens' attitudes towards refugees have changed such that anti-immigrant sentiments had become more among the citizens. Yet, this paper does not aim at understanding why those sentiments are mobilized or on what ground they have been manifested. Rather, this paper assesses how those attitudes are translated into political preferences.

As political attitudes are shaped within a transnational context, a few words on the transnational background of Turkish-Syrians relations are in order. Turkey always had a complicated, tense bilateral relationship with Syria which deteriorated further in the 1980s. Turkey and Syria have conflicts of interest over the Hatay province and water-sharing over the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In addition, this bilateral relationship is directly impacted from the presence of a Kurdish terrorist group- PKK's activities using the Syrian territory to engage in military attacks against Turkey from mid-1980s to 1999. Conflict of interests between Turkey and Syria deepened parallel to their stance on Muslim Brotherhood in Syria by Hafez Assad and the Syrian government's lack of enthusiasm to restrain the activities of PKK, which Turkey classifies as a terrorist organization (Altunisik 2010). As a result, two countries have come to the edge of war in the late 1990s. In 1998, Turkey and Syria agreed on the Adana Accords prohibiting PKK's activities in Northern Syria, leading Abdullah Ocalan, PKK's leader at the time, to flee from Syria in 1999. These developments created a detente period (Altunisik and Martin 2011) between Turkey and Syria. With the death of Hafez Assad and the rise of AKP in Turkey, the two countries started to cooperate in various areas: particularly tourism, trade, free movement of people, and military cooperation (Altunisik and Martin 2011, 576). The bilateral relationship along with a discourse of 'brotherhood' between both countries' presidents reached such a level that some scholars labelled this period of friendly relations as the Turkish-Syrian Spring (Ozkan 2019, 397). However, after the eruption of the Arab Spring, the foreign policy decisions of the AKP

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government have made Turkey one of the main actors in the Syrian Civil War against Assad (Egin 2013).

Turkish foreign policy during the Arab Spring, primarily formulated by Ahmet Davutoglu, was based on the aim to bring the Muslim Brotherhood parties to power from Tunisia to Syria (Ozkan 2019, 398). Syria was the keystone of the AKP government's desire to be a leader in the Muslim brotherhood peninsula (Ozkan 2019, 398). With this aim, Turkey has pursued three related policies: allowing free transit of arms and fighters to anti-Assad factions, supporting the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and advocating international intervention in Syria (Stein 2014, 64-65). These foreign policy decisions have ultimately failed and created the danger of an autonomous or independent Kurdish state in Northern Syria along with the spill-over of a new terrorist group, ISIL. These policy failures also had serious repercussions for Turkish security. For instance, the terrorist attack from Northern Syria terrorist groups to Reyhanlı in 2013 resulted in the death of 53 people and marked the first major spread of the Syrian Civil War directly onto the Turkish territory (Okyay 2017). To resolve these security problems, Turkey has conducted multiple operations in Northern Syria (Operation Euphrates Shield, August 2016-March 2017; Operation Olive Branch January-March 2018; Operation Peace Spring October 2019-November 2019). Even though there was not any direct confrontation between the Turkish military and Syrian military forces, the Turkish government's decision to utilize anti-Assad factions in Syria as proxies created an environment where the majority of Turkish citizens began to perceive the Syrian Civil War as a national security issue (Hale 2016).

The Turkish southern border with Syria, which is 911 km long, comprises six cities: Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, and Şırnak. Those six cities have varying characteristics ranging from different predominant ethnicities to socio-cultural habits. The border cities acted as the headquarters of those operations. In addition, Turkish border cities were targeted by Northern Syrian terrorist groups several times, leading to the deaths of dozens of Turkish citizens. Consequently, Turkish citizens, particularly those at the border-cities, directly experience the Syrian Civil War in their daily lives. As Okyay (2017, 831) emphasizes: “[Turkey’s] pursuit of enhanced regional power through involvement in an external conflict via proxies might lead them to tolerate the blurring of their borders, even though this may seem to contradict an essential attribute of statehood and sovereignty.”

Putting all those factors together, it would be expected that citizens might punish the government because of its policy failures as the civil war continues. However, foreign policy decisions of governments might occasionally bring electoral success. For instance, the rally-round-the-flag effect emphasizes how foreign policy decisions increase the approval rates of governments even for a short time (Mueller 1970; Mueller 1973). Regarding the Turkish case, Hale (2016, 59) defines the situation as follow: “Domestically, the idea of a resurgent Turkey in the Middle East bolstered the AKP’s popularity and contributed to a

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growing perception amongst the party's base that Erdogan was a statesman capable of deftly managing global crises."

With the Arab Spring reaching Syria, Syrians escaped to Turkey running away from the atrocities of the civil war. Most Syrians entered Turkey through border-check points which are located in the border cities. From the beginning of the influx of refugees, the Turkish government tried to control this refugee flow through legal processes. On the analysis of the legal processes, one point needs clarification. Turkey does not grant Syrian people, who flee from the war, refugee status. This is tied to Turkish reservations to the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocol. Even though Turkey is a signatory to both legal documents, it has geographic limitations granting asylum rights only to Europeans (Icduygu 2015). Because of this reservation, non-EU citizens are not eligible to resettle in Turkey even after UNCHR recognizes them as refugees (Icduygu 2015, 5). Consequently, Syrians were granted 'temporary protection' status rather than refugees. Nonetheless, keeping in mind the differences, we interchangeably use "refugee" and "Syrian" to define people who migrate to Turkey after 2011 because of the civil war. Turkey has governed the refugee inflow process through legal amendments stipulating that Syrian refugees should apply to the local authorities to be registered (Regulations of Temporary Protection 2014, p.6204). Upon registration, refugees are transferred to the temporary protection centres to be relocated to other cities by the authorities. According to October 2017 government resources, 15 out of 21 centres were located in the five border cities (except Şırnak).⁴ While most of those centres are currently closed, 4 out of 7 remaining centres are located in the border cities.⁵ As a consequence, Turkish citizens who are living closer to the border cities have been continuously exposed to the refugees for the last couple of years. Since the Syrians are resettled to other cities after a certain amount of time, their contacts with the local people are short-lived, which cannot affect political behavior. However, Dinas et al. (2019) showed that even short, but continuous, exposure to refugees can play a significant role in shaping political behavior. Of course, in the Greek islands, the flows of refugees were unauthorized by the local authorities unlike Turkey. Consequently, the resettlement of the refugees significantly changed the lives of local people in the border areas.

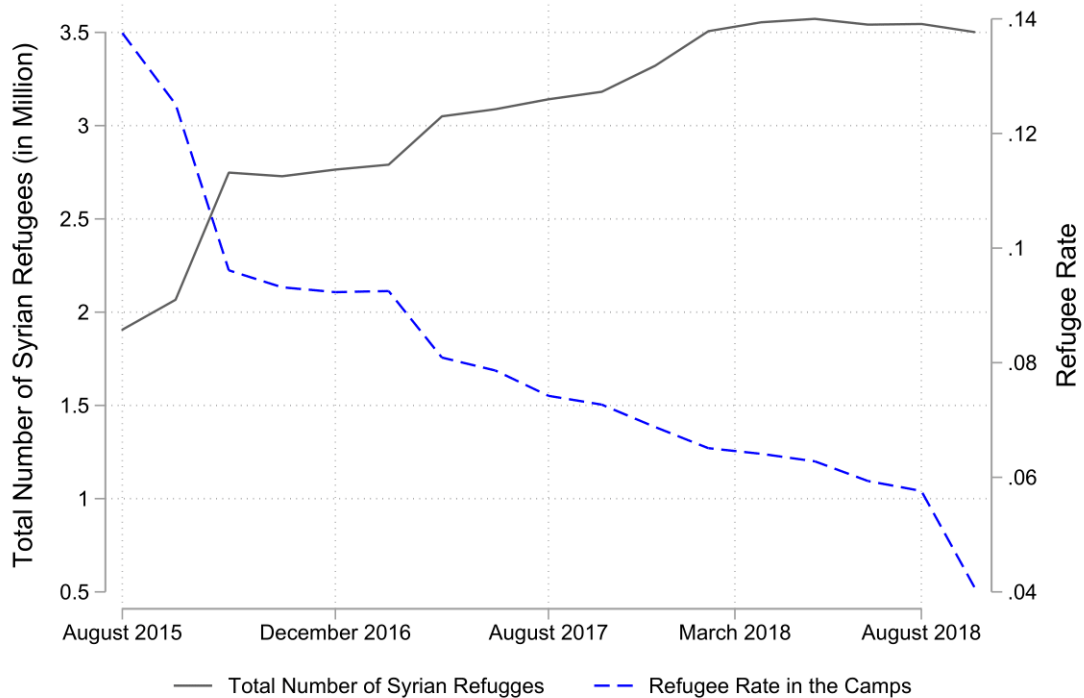
4

https://www.afad.gov.tr/kurumlar/afad.gov.tr/2374/files/02_10_2017_Suriye_GBM_Bilgi_Notu.pdf, "Temporary Protection Centers," AFAD, September 10, 2017.

⁵ <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>, "Temporary Protection," Directorate General of Migration Management, July 6, 2020.

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Figure 1: Ratio of Syrian Refugees in Temporary Protection Centers by Years

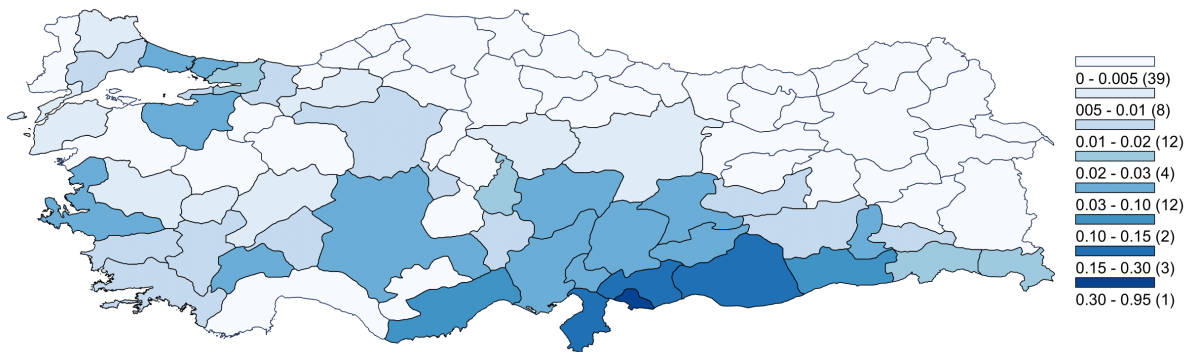


For the Turkish case, Syrian refugees, after their registration in temporary protection centres, are resettled to different cities. While the border cities have played a key role during the registration process, their role does not end there. The number of refugees who are residing in temporary protection centres constitutes only a small part of the total number. As demonstrated in Figure 1, refugees hosted in temporary centres always remained around 10% of the total number of Syrians. Furthermore, the allocation process does not give priority to the cities that are far away from the border. Unfortunately, there is no clarification on which aspects the government has considered regarding the allocation of refugees to other cities. However, it seems that the ratio to the local population is not a prior consideration, even though the cultural and social characteristics of local people in border cities are relatively more similar to Syrian refugees. Nonetheless, Figure 2 suggests that cities that are closer to the Syrian borders are given priority in the allocation process. For example, in 2018, there were more than 130.000 Syrian refugees in Kilis that correspond to 92% of the local population. Kilis is a unique case with its ratio considering the average ratio of refugee to local population in the country was 3.5%. Figure 2 demonstrates that ratio of Syrian refugees to local people are higher in cities that are closer to the Syrian border. It must be noted that even though in 2018 the highest number of refugees (more than 560.000) were residing in İstanbul, this only corresponds to 3.7% of the local population. Similarly, despite hosting an almost equal number of refugees with Kilis, the ratio in Konya was 4.7%. The difference between the absolute number of refugees and the ratio of refugees

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to the local population is significant because a higher ratio suggests the local population is more likely to be exposed to refugees.

Figure 2: Syrian Refugees Ratio to Local Citizens as June 21, 2018



The refugee inflows suggest that citizens who are living closer to the border, are exposed to more refugees, which in return leads them to have different political behavior compared to other citizens in Turkey. However, political behavior is a complex phenomenon that is tied to multiple determinants; and without a doubt, changes in public opinion can affect it, with some determinants directly related to the refugees.

Two sets of factors differentiate Turkey from other European countries in terms of the interplay of the domestic and transnational dynamics. The first factor is tied to the Turkish foreign policy, and its active role in the Syrian Civil War. Second, the similarity between the Turkish citizens in the border areas and the Syrians in terms of their socio-cultural characteristics. The majority of Turkish citizens are Sunni Muslims living in a constitutionally secular state. Additionally, during the eighteen years of AKP governance, the social lives and culture have heavily shifted towards more conservative and Islamic-oriented lifestyles (Sommer 2014, 246-247). A significant portion of citizens in the border cities have common characteristics with the Syrians- in terms of their ethnic background. It is legally prohibited to ask for the ethnicity of an individual in public polls in Turkey. Yet, a way to go around this restriction is to ask for the mother tongue, and this particular question in Turkish census data reveals that there is a significant number of Turkish citizens who are ethnically tied to Syrians (Mutlu 1996). Taken into consideration the socio-cultural differences, along with the resilience of security concerns; the citizens, who reside closer to the Syrian border, are less likely to discriminate against the refugees, and consider punishing the incumbent party because of its open-door policy. We expect, therefore, relatively little change in the electoral support to the AKP in the border cities.

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This leads to a complication as it is not clear which party Turkish citizens would support if they perceived a negative impact of the Turkish immigration policies. The only political party that can be considered as extreme right is the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). However, MHP has entered into an alliance with the AKP after July 2016. The other alternative 'extreme' right-wing party, Good Party (İYİP); was established with the former MHP members who resigned from the MHP following this alliance with AKP. However, the İYİP has only participated in two elections so far, which is not sufficient for a comparison. However, at least a party should be a viable choice for those who want to protest the incumbent party for its policies with regard to refugees. Though much has been discussed regarding the definition of extreme-right parties, the defining criteria of being considered as an extreme-right party is still unclear. There are some theoretical categorizations such as one that had been developed by Fennema (1997) as protest parties, racist parties, and extreme-right parties. However, each of those categorizations fails to point out clear-cut differentiation that leads to insufficient labelling of those parties. As (Fennema 1997, 474) states, while defining extreme-right parties: "*one thing that they share in common is resentment against migrants and the immigration policy of their governments.*" Surprisingly, since the beginning of the refugee crisis, CHP was the only party that has consistently criticized the government for its policies in the Syrian Civil War and proposed restrictive migration policies. While CHP cannot be considered as an extreme-right party, there are visible resemblances between CHP and European extreme-right parties on the issue of restrictive migration policies. In fact, in-depth parliamentary discourse analysis illustrates how CHP has successfully increased the issue-saliency of refugee debate by focusing on its negative effects on the Turkish society (Apaydin and Muftuler-Bac, 2021).

CHP's position on the migration issues has shifted towards a negative stance when compared to its party in 2014. We derive this conclusion from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey which provides information for parties' positioning on subjects such as political ideology, EU policies, and migration administered by experts who specialize in political parties in the respective countries. Regarding parties' positions on immigration policies, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey codes parties on an eleven-point scale, where 0 represents fully opposing a restrictive policy on immigration whereas 10 represents fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration. The survey locates AKP as 2.89, MHP as 7, and CHP as 4.5 in 2014; whereas in 2019, the parties' position on restrictive policies scores 5, 8.12, and 8.12, respectively. Despite an increasing trend in support of restrictive policies, CHP is the political party in Turkey that has shifted most radically towards restrictive policies. The shift was at such a level that it is positioning CHP at the same place as MHP, even though CHP is not a right-wing party. Comparing CHP's positioning on restrictive policies with extreme-right parties in Europe indicates a surprising level of similarity. In 2019, Chapel Hill Survey place Lega Nord at 9.5, Freedom Party of Austria at 9.8, Golden Dawn and National Rally to 9.8, Alternative for Germany to 9.9. It can be argued that CHP has filled the policy area in Turkey, which has been left empty due to the MHP's alliance with

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the incumbent party, as a viable alternative for citizens who are supporting the anti-immigrant policies. Yet, CHP's positioning has never reached a degree where the party can be framed as an extremist-right party.

Hence, it might be the case that voters who are dissatisfied with the refugee policies of the incumbent government shift towards CHP because it was the only alternative party that reveals a strong preference in favour of restrictive policies on immigration. Accordingly, we put forth two hypotheses to assess the linkages between domestic and transnational dynamics by an analysis of the Turkish electoral data and its possible ties to the Syrians in Turkey.

Hypothesis 1: The marginal effect of refugee ratio on the incumbent vote share is negative and lowest when distance to the Syrian border is at its nearest level. This effect increases in magnitude as distance to the border increases.

Hypothesis 2: The marginal effect of refugee ratio on the vote share of main-opposition party (CHP) is positive and lowest when distance to the Syrian border is at its nearest level. This effect increases in magnitude as distance to the border increases.

The next section presents our findings on these two propositions.

Research Design

This paper aims to understand the changes in the vote shares of the main political parties in Turkey in line with the Syrians' presence in various cities as a dimension for domestic and transnational politics. The dependent variables are the vote shares of each party at the electoral district level. Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, six elections were held in Turkey. The time frames for the different models object to change because refugee data are available since 2015.⁶

All the election results utilized in the empirical analysis come directly from the webpage of the Supreme Election Council.⁷ For the parliamentary elections, we divided the number of valid votes to each parties' votes. After the constitutional changes adopted in 2017, which transformed the parliamentary system into a presidential one, both parliamentary and presidential elections were jointly held in 2019. We use the results of the parliamentary elections to be able to compare them with the earlier elections. For local elections, getting the viable results of the elections is relatively more complicated. In Turkey, there

⁶ The results of June 2015 elections were excluded and the results of November 2015 elections were used.

⁷ Supreme Election Council, <https://www.ysk.gov.tr>

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are thirty metropolises where a local citizen casts votes for the municipality he or she lives, and the mayor of that city. For those thirty metropolises, we use the results of the mayor elections, considering that all local citizens are able to vote. In the rest of the cities, we summed up all local municipalities' valid votes and the number of votes for the parties. Taken into consideration of electoral alliances in the 2019 local elections, we also created a dummy variable for the alliances (Cumhur and Millet). Because measuring vote differences of a party through disregarding the other parties' electoral supports might be biased, we excluded local election results in 2019 where AKP, MHP, CHP, İYİ did not nominate a candidate. In the 2019 elections, in some cities, mainly in İstanbul and Ankara, HDP also did not nominate a candidate, instead, unofficially supported CHP's candidates. Yet, because there was no official alliance declaration from either side, we have not considered that aspect. All in all, the dependent variable is the change in the vote-share of the parties in each district with respect to the last election.

As for the data for the number of Syrian refugees, we utilized the reports from the Directorate General of Migration Management's website.⁸ The Directorate updates this data each month, and we used the data released closest to the elections. The details about the dates of the refugee numbers can be found in the Appendix. Considering the immense fluctuations of the population as well as the number of refugees from one city to another, the probability of local citizens, who are living in different cities, interacting with a refugee varies significantly. In order to fix this issue, we use the ratio of refugees to the local population. For the second main independent variable, proximity to the Syrian border, we calculated to the closest distance between each city centre and the Syrian border. Taking the nearest distance between the border of each city and the Syrian border would not alter the results substantively due to the small changes in the distances.

There are a series of control variables that are employed in estimations. The first set of control variables is related to the demography of the city; namely, the percentage of males and the share of sixty-years or older people, which are factors with significant effects on voting behavior. The second set of variables mostly aims to control the welfare of the districts. We use two different variables to control economic welfare; unemployment rate and GDP per capita in the districts. The last set of control variables is about the socio-cultural status of the districts. To control the education level of a district we use illiteracy rates, and the centre-periphery dimension (Mardin 1973), we control for the average household. Last but not least, we also controlled for the crime rates in the districts. The control variables are lagged for one year. The detailed summary statistics of the dataset can be found in the Appendix as well.

Equation 1:

$$\Delta V_{n,i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 R_{i,t} + \beta_2 D_i + \beta_3 C_{it} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

⁸ Directorate General of Migration Management, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/>

Equation 2:

$$\Delta V_{n,i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 R_{i,t} + \beta_2 D_i + \beta_4 R_{i,t} \times D_i + \beta_3 C_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

We use two different methods to test our hypotheses. The first empirical strategy is ordinary least-square (OLS). We start by running series of multivariate OLS regressions with standard error clustered on cities: additive models (Equation 1) and interactive models (Equation 2). $\Delta V_{n,i,t}$ represents the change in the vote share of party n in city i in election year t . $R_{i,t}$ represents refugee ratio in city i in election year t . In some models, we replace $R_{i,t}$ with $\Delta R_{i,t}$, which measure the change in refugee ratio in the respective city from election year $t - 1$ to t . Using the change of refugee ratio will allow us to explain whether any significant change in vote share is directly related to the refugee ratio. In other words, it would allow us to control any possible endogeneity issue. D_i represents the distance to the Syrian border of city i . In Equation 2, the interaction term is included. Lastly, $C_{i,t}$ represents a series of economic, demographic, and socio-cultural control variables that are explained above. OLS is suitable for the data that we have since none of the assumptions of the model is violated.

Equation 3:

$$V_{n,i,t} = \gamma_i + \lambda_t + \delta_{DID} \Delta R_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

The second empirical strategy is difference-in-difference. Equation 3 portrays the model. Similar to Equations 1 and 2, $V_{n,i,t}$ represents the vote share of party n in city i in election year t , but without Δ since the main focus is the vote share. Similarly, $\Delta R_{i,t}$ represents a change in refugee ratio in city i from election year $t - 1$ to t . Instead of $C_{i,t}$ in Equations 1 and 2, Equation 3 contain γ_i and λ_t which captures the fixed effect a city and an election, respectively. In other words, with the fixed effects, we ruled out possible omitted variables that are not included in the model. In Equation 3, the focus is δ_{DID} that captures the effect of refugee ratio (R). As robustness check, we prefer to use Placebo tests where we relax the model through replacing $V_{n,i,t}$ with $V_{n,i,t-1}$. The idea is that since the refugee ratio will be from the election year $t-1$, the vote share of party n in election year $t - 1$ cannot be explained by the model. If there is any statistically significance of δ_{DID} in Placebo tests, the Equation 3 would not be robust for party n .

Empirical Results and Analyses

We run OLS estimators on the refugee ratio and the number of refugees using distance to the border as an explanatory variable (Appendix Table A.3). The findings suggest that the number of refugees, though the relationship is negative, is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Whereas 100 km increase in distance to the Syrian border, the share of Syrian refugees with respect to

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the local citizens decreases 1.4% and this effect is significant at the 95% confidence level. The results suggest that even though there is no statistically significant relationship between the number of refugees and distance to the Syrian border, the share of Syrian refugees is associated with the distance that in return might indicate a strong government role in the relocation process of the refugees. These preliminary findings are important because previous studies (Altindag and Kaushal 2021; Fisunoglu and Sert 2019) emphasize a selection bias such that refugees choose districts where they will be less likely to be exposed to discrimination. If the government is controlling the resettlement process based on the ratio of refugees, the results of estimations would be more robust due to this negligible nature of the selection bias.

Table 1: DID Estimates of the Impact of Refugee ratio on the Vote Share of The Parties⁹

	Model.1 AKP	Model.2 AKP	Model.3 MHP	Model.4 MHP	Model.5 CHP	Model.6 CHP
Distance to the Border	-0.001 (0.003)	0.007 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.004)
Refugee Rate	-0.010 (0.036)		-0.033 (0.036)		0.039** (0.019)	
Δ in Refugee Rate		0.843 (0.894)		0.208 (0.705)		0.984* (0.586)
Constant	75.390** (34.469)	-246.613*** (44.979)	-48.379* (28.171)	132.057*** (42.386)	28.924 (19.353)	34.052 (29.729)
N	211	130	211	130	212	131
N of clusters	81	81	81	81	81	81
R ²	0.147	0.376	0.283	0.317	0.064	0.184

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered by cities in parentheses. Control variables are omitted from the table.

Models 1, 3, and 5 include elections results from 2015, 2018, and 2019.

Model 2, 4, and 6 include the elections results from 2018 and 2019.

Two-tailed tests. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Previous studies emphasize how an exposure to an influx of refugees motivate people towards supporting right-wing parties. To understand how refugees have affected the local citizens voting behavior, we run a series of OLS estimator with robust standard errors clustered by cities along with unit and election fixed effects. The estimator would allow us to see the direct effect of refugees on local citizens. The models in Table 1 suggest that the fixed effect of the refugee ratio on the vote share of any given party is not statistically distinguishable from 0 at any given conventional significance levels. In the earlier sections, we argue that CHP was the main party that has consistently sustained its opposition to AKP, particularly in AKP's policy failures and outcomes of the Syrian Civil War. Model 5 shows the effect of change in the refugee ratio on the vote share of CHP. Similarly, the results do not suggest a statistically significant relationship. The findings are not surprising, since the prior

⁹ In the Appendix, testing the same models for 2015 as the treatment year, which was the first election after the refugee crisis, are given. Similarly, the results do not yield any statistically significant results.

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expectations are not to find a relationship countrywide. Instead, citizens who are residing closer to the Syrian border are more likely to continue supporting the incumbent party regardless of the number of refugees. Furthermore, as visible in Figure 2, the refugee ratio accelerates relatively more in cities that are closer to borders. If the cities that have supported CHP are further investigated, it would be noticed that border cities mostly vote for a conservative party. The same arguments run in the opposite direction for the incumbent party. Nonetheless, the results in Table 1 successfully validate previous studies even after extending our analysis with the inclusion of the 2018 and 2019 elections. Hence, we need to consider distance to the border in this analysis as well. Table 2 demonstrates how refugee ratios have affected the voting behavior conditional on the distance to the border.

Table 2: Additive OLS Regressions on Party Vote Share

	Model.1 AKP	Model.2 AKP	Model.3 MHP	Model.4 MHP	Model.5 CHP	Model.6 CHP
Distance to the Border	-0.001 (0.003)	0.007 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.004)
Refugee Rate	-0.010 (0.036)		-0.033 (0.036)		0.039** (0.019)	
Δ in Refugee Rate		0.843 (0.894)		0.208 (0.705)		0.984* (0.586)
Constant	75.390** (34.469)	-246.613*** (44.979)	-48.379* (28.171)	132.057*** (42.386)	28.924 (19.353)	34.052 (29.729)
N	211	130	211	130	212	131
N of clusters	81	81	81	81	81	81
R ²	0.147	0.376	0.283	0.317	0.064	0.184

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered by cities in parentheses. Control variables are omitted from the table.

Models 1, 3, and 5 include elections results from 2015, 2018, and 2019.

Model 2, 4, and 6 include the elections results from 2018 and 2019.

Two-tailed tests. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 2 shows the OLS results for both refugee ratio and changes in refugee ratio. All the models in Table 2 add up to highlight the effects of refugees which are not conditional on the distance to the border. We prefer to present additive models in order to see how the substantive effect of refugees will change once the distance to the border is included in the model. In all the models in Table 2, there are a series of control variables that are statistically and substantively significant but for the focus of this study, we will only present the main independent variables. For neither AKP and MHP, there is no statistically significant relationship between the refugee ratio or change in refugee ratio and vote share as Models 1 to 4 show. However, for the main opposition party, both Models 5 and 6 suggest a statistically significant relationship between the refugee ratio and change in refugee ratio with the vote share of CHP. Substantively speaking, the findings suggest that for each standard deviation increase in the refugee ratio and change in refugee ratio, CHP gains 0.38 and 0.86 vote share, respectively. In other words, if the refugee

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ratio keeps increasing, the local citizens are more willing to support an anti-immigrant party. However, whether the punishment is ubiquitous over the country is still not clear. To analyze this, Table 3 presents the results of the conditional relationship.

Table 3: Interactive OLS Regressions on Party Vote Share

	Model.1 AKP	Model.2 AKP	Model.3 MHP	Model.4 MHP	Model.5 CHP	Model.6 CHP
Distance to the Border	0.000 (0.004)	0.007 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.005)	0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.003)
Refugee Rate	0.031 (0.038)		-0.054 (0.035)		0.047** (0.020)	
Distance to the Border × Refugee Rate	-0.004*** (0.001)		0.002* (0.001)		-0.001 (0.001)	
Δ in Refugee Rate		0.708 (0.966)		0.118 (0.681)		0.271 (0.410)
Distance to the Border × Δ in Refugee Rate		0.001 (0.002)		0.001 (0.002)		0.005** (0.002)
ln(Population)	-1.600* (0.916)	0.080 (1.310)	1.298 (0.815)	-1.773 (1.204)	-1.500** (0.593)	-2.817*** (0.923)
Male	-168.461*** (57.720)	328.491*** (73.374)	104.519** (40.852)	-132.070** (62.945)	-44.385 (31.077)	-58.389 (42.341)
60 Years or Older Citizens	20.386 (29.172)	115.042*** (32.093)	-31.371 (21.388)	-82.519** (36.627)	24.044** (12.034)	60.277*** (20.900)
Illiteracy	245.081*** (61.249)	17.825 (78.705)	-84.746* (43.249)	53.860 (83.126)	29.607 (32.835)	89.285* (46.187)
Number of Crimes	3259.824*** (1097.904)	4406.046*** (1109.222)	-3738.807*** (908.028)	-2713.455*** (960.557)	616.399 (642.808)	890.641 (709.476)
Unemployment	109.849 (68.768)	42.198 (48.570)	-18.599 (50.469)	-52.885 (60.371)	-3.844 (23.672)	-19.202 (27.133)
Existence of a Camp	-0.188 (2.603)	-3.030 (2.695)	0.497 (1.907)	2.094 (1.519)	0.256 (1.047)	2.003 (1.252)
Local Election	-4.373* (2.267)	0.700 (2.407)	11.714*** (2.005)	7.822*** (1.970)	0.789 (1.644)	1.783 (1.518)
Average Household	3.378** (1.631)	11.181*** (2.011)	-3.333*** (1.220)	-5.547** (2.170)	2.350*** (0.793)	4.786*** (1.421)
GDP Pc	0.002*** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Constant	52.769 (35.833)	-247.217*** (45.140)	-36.634 (28.332)	131.655*** (42.715)	23.795 (21.068)	30.870 (30.157)
N	211	130	211	130	212	131
N of clusters	81	81	81	81	81	81
R ²	0.162	0.376	0.289	0.317	0.067	0.207

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered by cities in parentheses.

Models 1, 3, and 5 include elections results from 2015, 2018, and 2019.

Model 2, 4, and 6 include the elections results from 2018 and 2019.

Two-tailed tests. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Similar to the previous table, we run a series of OLS for both refugee ratio and change in the refugee ratio. To start with the incumbent party, conditionality on the distance to the border alter the results substantially. Yet due to the complexity of interpreting a conditional relationship in regression models, before discussing the main independent variables, summarizing the

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control variables in Model 1 and 2 is beneficial. The results suggest that increasing male rates decrease the vote share of AKP. On the other hand, increasing GDP per capita also increases the vote share of AKP, however, the unemployment rate has no effect on the vote share of AKP. The results are not surprising because previous studies already demonstrated how economic-voting theory fails to find empirical support in Turkey (Carkoglu and Yildirim 2018, Kalaycioglu 2018). Model 1 supports the centre-periphery debate such that increasing one-person in average household and one-percent illiteracy rate increase the AKP's vote share by 3.3 and 2.4 points, respectively. Surprisingly, a one-percent increase in the number of crime rates to local citizens increases the AKP's vote share by 3-points. Population and local election variables decrease the AKP's vote share. Figure 3 illustrates how the marginal effect of the refugee ratio (distance to the Syrian border) varies across the in-sample range of distance to the border (refugee ratio). To do this, in Figure 3, we set all the control variables to their representative values (means or medians).

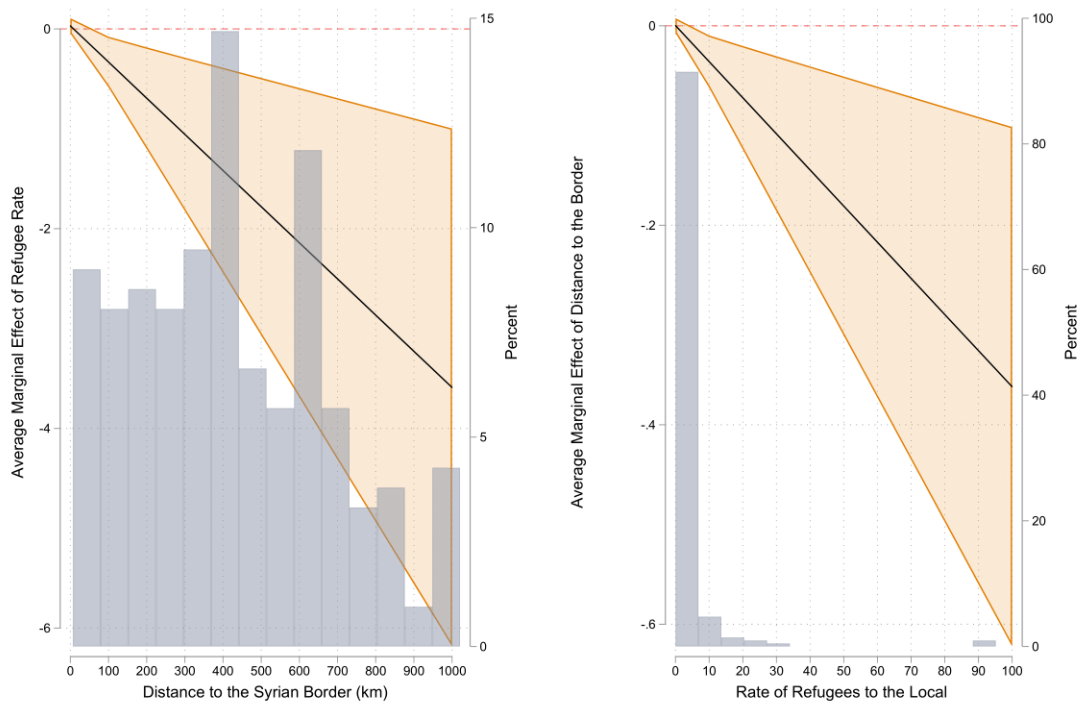
The first graph in Figure 3 shows that in the border cities even though the marginal effect of the refugee ratio is very small, it is not statistically distinguishable from 0. After the 100 km mark, the marginal effect of refugees is increasing and affecting the AKP's vote share substantively. The incumbent party has lost the highest vote share in cities that are most distant to the border. The results support the first hypothesis, such that local citizens become more sensitive to the influx of refugees and punish the incumbent party as they live further away from the border whereas citizens who are residing at the border cities are less willing to punish the government. Looking at the overlaid histogram, which shows the distribution of cities' distances to the border, the number of cities in decreasing confidence intervals become wider. In all distances, the marginal effect of the refugee ratio is statistically significant. These results point out to two possible explanations. First, socio-cultural similarities between the local citizens and the refugees are higher in border cities which might decrease prejudices against outgroup members. Secondly, Turkish involvement in the Syrian Civil War and its repercussions on the daily lives of the local citizens in the border cities might have made those citizens less willing to punish the government.

The main motivation of this paper was to understand how the influx of refugees has affected voting behavior. Clearly, increasing the refugee ratio has cost the incumbent party a considerable amount of vote share especially in the cities that are distant from the Syrian border. The local citizens' punishment of the incumbent is one part of the story, and another part is who is rewarded. Previous studies have emphasized parties that support restrictive migration policies succeed in mobilizing local citizens. Models 3 and 4 in Table 3 show that the conditional relationship between the refugee ratio and distance to

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the border has no statistically significant effect on the vote share of MHP.¹⁰ In line with the prior expectations, the nonresponsive attitudes of MHP towards the refugee crisis on the top of entering an alliance with the incumbent party did hinder the opportunity of mobilizing the public.

Figure 3: The Average Marginal Effects of Refugee ratio (Distance to the Syrian Border) on the Δ Vote Share of AKP, Based on Model 1 in Table 3



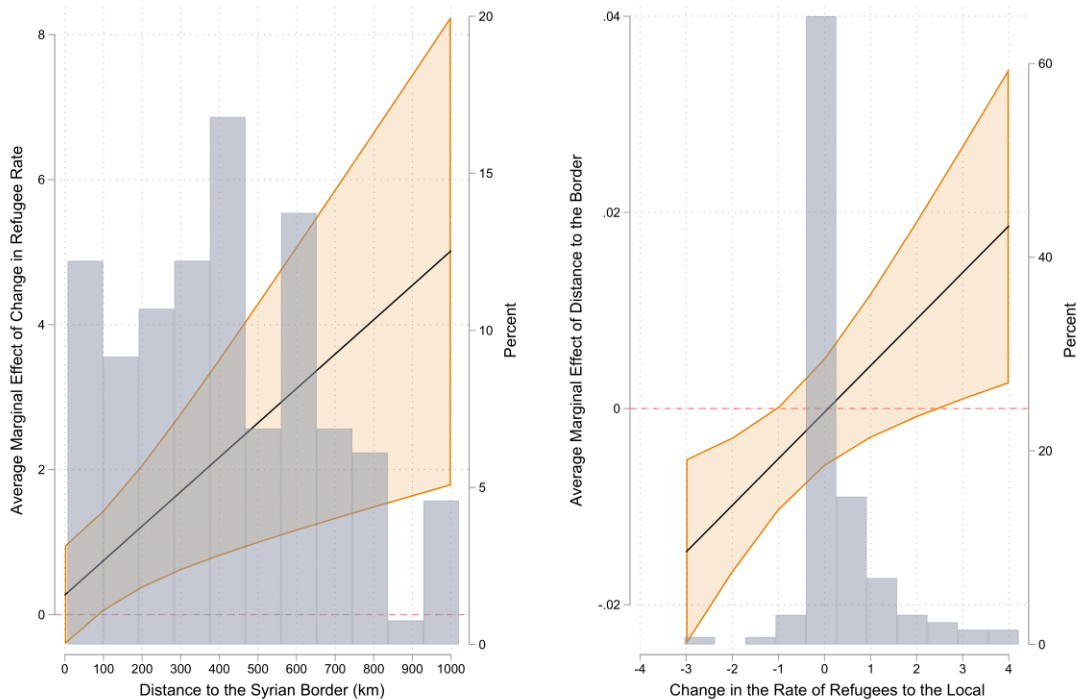
On the other hand, Model 6 in Table 3 suggests that CHP has succeeded to find support for its anti-immigrant policies. Unlike the AKP case, as Model 5 suggests, there is no statistical relationship between the refugee ratio and distance to the border with the CHP's vote share. However, the change in the refugee ratio has substantially increased the CHP's vote share. Similar to the earlier analyses, there are some intriguing results, especially with the control variables. Increasing the average household number and illiteracy ratio have statistically significant effects on CHP. An additional increase in the average household and a one-percent increase in the illiteracy rate increase the CHP's vote share by 4.6 and 1 points, respectively. These results challenge the centre-periphery thesis and suggest that change in the refugee ratio might have slightly altered the decades-long ideological and socio-cultural clashes in

¹⁰ The marginal effects are calculated for both models and they are not statistically distinguishable from zero. Hence, the related graphs are excluded due to the space limitations.

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Turkish politics. Our findings also illustrate that older people 60-years and older consistently vote for the CHP. However, none of the economy or welfare-related variables have a statistically significant effect on the CHP's vote share. This is interesting because, one of the reasons for local citizens opposing refugees is their expected detrimental effect on the welfare of the population. The reason behind this novelty might derive from the model specification or the data, but further in-depth analyses. Model 6 suggests that the unconditional effects of refugee ratio and distance to the border are not statistically significant. On the other hand, the conditional relationship is still significant at the 0.05% significance level. To interpret this conditional relationship, Figure 4 graphically illustrates how the marginal effect of the refugee ratio (distance to the Syrian border) varies across the in-sample range of distance to the border (refugee ratio).

Figure 4: The Average Marginal Effects of Δ in Refugee ratio (Distance to the Syrian Border) on the Δ Vote Share of CHP, Based on Model 6 in Table 3



The first graph in Figure 4 shows that similar to the AKP case, within the 100 km distance to the Syrian border the marginal effect of the refugee ratio is not statistically significant. At the 100 km distance, the marginal effect of the refugee ratio on the CHP's vote share is less than 1%. An increase in distance to the border increases the marginal effect of the refugee ratio. In the cities that are most distant to the border, CHP increases its vote share is almost 5%. In the effective sample size, which encompasses the 2018 and 2019 elections results for 131 cities, the average difference in the vote share of CHP is around

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-1%. Considering this average, a 5% increase is substantively significant. The second graph in Figure 4 also has some noteworthy implications. As visible on the left side of the figure, in the cities where the refugee ratio has decreased compared to the ratio in the earlier election; CHP has lost votes. On the other hand, if the refugee ratio has increased, CHP succeeded in increasing its votes. In the cities where the refugee ratio has not changed significantly (increase or decrease 1-percent), the CHP's votes are not affected. These results empirically support our second hypothesis. The estimation results of the overall effect of refugees on the CHP's vote share in Table 1 were not significant. The earlier studies also failed to conclude a relationship between the refugee ratio and the CHP's vote share. However, as shown in Table 3 and Figure 4, political behavior of Turkish citizens is not uniform across all cities. Once the distance to the border is considered as a condition of voting for CHP due to the refugee crisis, the relationship becomes statistically and substantively significant.

Then, the question remains as to why the government is not still responsive to the refugee crisis that citizens are discontented about. It can be directly linked to domestic and transnational dynamics. The existence of the link between domestic and transnational is a current debate among IR paradigms. Adamson and Tsourapas (2019, 115-116) define the migration diplomacy as: *"states' use of diplomatic tools, processes, and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility"*. Turkey's geographical location places it to a focal point for the EU migration policy agenda. As the EU has continued to grow, Turkey's borders have constituted the southeast land and sea external borders of the EU. (Ustubici and Icduygu 2015). An ability to control the external borders of the EU as a neighbouring country has given an upper hand to the Turkish government with the European countries (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019). The EU-Turkey refugee deal, which was signed in 2016 to control unauthorized migration in the Aegean Sea, is one of the cornerstones on the pathway of the bilateral relationship between the EU and Turkey for the regulation of migration (Muftuler-Bac 2020) On several occasions, Erdogan has used refugees as a bargaining chip. For instance, after the European Parliament votes for suspending the membership negotiation with Turkey, Erdoğan warned that: *"these border gates will be opened. Neither I nor my people will be affected by these dry threats. It wouldn't matter if all of you approved the vote. Similarly, in February 2020, the Turkish government has decided not to control irregular immigration to the EU anymore. Erdoğan stated that: "We will not close these doors in the coming period, and this will continue... Why? The European Union needs to keep its promises. We don't have to take care of this many refugees, to feed them."* These are the perfect illustrations of how the Turkish government has utilized migration diplomacy. However, it is also worth emphasizing that the examples differ from each other such that in the latter case Erdoğan gave those statements shortly after 33 Turkish soldiers were killed by the Assad-supported forces in Syria. In other words, Erdogan framed the refugee issues due to Turkey's discontent about the European partners' lack of support in Syria. Additionally, from an alternative perspective, the framing was an example of how a government can distract public opinion by putting forward

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another salient issue. The Turkish government also has been justifying the military operations to Northern Syria with the aim of establishing security zones for the millions of refugees that Turkey is hosting. All in all, while the AKP government has been suffering from the domestic consequences of refugees, the government also exploits this crisis in bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries.

Our empirical findings indicate a clear vote shift towards the main opposition party, CHP. We showed that local citizens, who are dissatisfied with refugees, voted for CHP because of its anti-immigrant stance. This does not mean that CHP is an extreme-right party, but it points out to similar anti-immigrant policies of CHP and extreme-right parties in Europe. The most identifiable characteristic of extreme-right parties is their demonization of immigrants (Fennema 1997). For instance, one of the CHP members of the parliament, Tanju Özcan, expressed his dissatisfaction with refugees in a commission of investigation bill in 2017, emphasizing how local citizens cannot benefit from social help services due to the volume of refugees, who also apply the government social services.¹¹ Özcan was the MoP of Bolu, a small city in the Black Sea region, and he was nominated as a mayor of the same city in the 2019 election. Even though Bolu as a major city did not host a significant number of refugees, there was still a substantial increase. The CHP candidate in local elections in Bolu presented a clear anti-refugee stance, campaigning on the anti-refugee sentiments in the city, Özcan argued that refugees have stayed enough in Bolu and it is time for them to leave. In the 2019 local elections, with this anti-refugee campaign, CHP received 53% of the votes, up from its previous 30% electoral support, and won the municipality which was formerly ruled by AKP. CHP was able to present itself as an alternative to local citizens, claiming it could solve the refugee issue created by the AKP government.

Conclusion

The refugee crisis that erupted after the Syrian civil war was detrimental for countries in Europe. For example, Greece and Italy have undergone serious financial and socio-cultural crises. As a reaction to the refugee crisis along with the economic difficulties, right-wing populist parties have managed to frame themselves as viable alternatives. However, the largest burden of the refugees was not placed on the shoulders of Europe. Turkey has been hosting the largest number of refugees in the world for almost a decade. While scholars focused explaining the effect of refugees on voting behavior in European countries, similar literature in Turkey is underdeveloped. Even though numerous case studies examine refugees, most of them either focused on the economic outcomes or socio-cultural problems that both refugees and local citizens are faced with. Only a few studies analyze the effect of refugees on voting behavior in-depth; and conclude either minor or statistically insignificant

¹¹ Grand National Assembly of Turkey Session Records. TBMM, 20 July, 2016. <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b11601h.htm>

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relationships between the presence of refugees and voting decisions of citizens in Turkey. However, it seems almost impossible to argue that citizens are unconcerned with millions of refugees. Hence, this paper investigated the effect of refugees on voting behaviour in Turkish elections. The findings of the paper uncovering this linkage do not apply in a routinized manner for every Turkish citizen. Borrowing from the idea of contextual determinants on shaping voting behavior, this paper demonstrated how local citizens' priorities change parallel to their physical distance to the Syrian border. In other words, citizens, who reside in the border-cities, are directly affected by the Syrian civil war, whereas the very same consequences of the conflict are absent in the distant cities. Instead, the citizens in the distant cities only observe refugees and reshape their political decisions accordingly. Even though border-cities host most of the Syrians, security concerns and socio-cultural similarities play mitigating roles in shaping their continued electoral support to the ruling party.

Using a generic and extended dataset, the paper demonstrated that even taking into account the results of the 2018 and 2019 elections, the change in the AKP's, CHP's and the MHP's vote shares nationally are not directly associated with the presence of refugees. However, the paper's empirical results showed that this effect of refugee ratios changes from one city to another, depending on geographical proximity to the Syrian border. This variation is conditional on proximity to the Syrian borders. Thus, we found out that an increase in refugee ratio decreases the vote share of the incumbent party when the distance to the border increases. While the marginal effect of refugee ratio on the vote share of AKP is relatively minor and insignificant in the border cities, the extent of this negative effects of refugee ratio increases in distant cities. On the other hand, CHP, which has continued to oppose the incumbent party in most of the policy areas particularly in immigration, succeeded in mobilizing local citizens who are dissatisfied with the refugees. Our first finding shows that in the cities where the refugee ratio has not altered significantly, CHP could not mobilize any additional voters. Yet, in the cities such as Bolu where the refugee ratio increased each year, voters shifted towards CHP. This is a significant finding of our empirical analysis. Additionally, this shift was stronger in distant cities compared to border cities.

This paper contributed to the literature on immigration as well as Turkish politics in a variety of ways. First of all, even though several studies explain the effect of refugees in Turkey, there are only a few studies that examine the relationship between refugees and voting behavior in Turkey. The existing studies mostly focus on the economic aspects of the refugees in Turkey. Secondly, prior studies suggest a lack of distinguishable effect of refugees on voting behavior in Turkey. To affirm this conclusion, we conducted an excessive voting analysis. In addition to the 2014 and 2015 elections, we extended the sample with the 2018 and 2019 elections. Though our results do not alter significantly for the incumbent and the main opposition parties after the inclusion of the latest elections; for the right-wing party MHP, our findings suggest a considerable amount of vote loss. This loss of votes for a right wing party is a critical finding

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because it reveals how a one-size-fits-all approach in the theoretical arguments of immigrants' effects on voting behavior does not work. Neither the ideology of the party nor the extremism of this ideology is fully capable of explaining the political behavior of citizens. Our findings suggest that the voting behavior of local citizens is not uniform all over the country. We have provided an alternative answer as to why previous studies on European countries cannot be replicated in Turkey because of three main reasons: Turkey is an actor in the Syrian civil war due to the geographical location, there are clear differences in party structures compared to the European countries and the Turkish socio-cultural structure have a degree of similarity with the Syrians. All in all, increasing the salience of security issues in border cities mitigates the negative effect of refugees on voting behavior. On the other hand, due to the emphasis on anti-immigrant policies, though not as harshly as in the case of the European countries, CHP has succeeded to propose itself as an alternative party, particularly in non-border cities. It is clear that CHP benefited from the refugee crisis considerably. The main contribution of this paper is to bring a new perspective to understanding the effect of refugees on voting behavior where the issue-proximity plays a moderating factor.

What makes geographical proximity to the border a mitigative factor on the effect of refugees is the geographical location of Turkey. Additionally, from an alternative perspective, spatial proximity arguments can bring different explanations to the recent refugee crisis. Investigating how individuals' voting behavior change as the distance to the settlements of refugees increases or decreases can contribute to the literature on immigration considerably. In particular, it remains to be seen as to why AKP has followed the strategy of hosting refugees even though this policy has costed the AKP electoral support, and how CHP has succeeded to present itself as an alternative to solve the refugee crisis.

The policy failures of AKP have caused serious consequences for the government. The latest and most drastic one was the results of the last election in 2019. The incumbent party has lost the biggest city, İstanbul, and the capital city, Ankara, which both have been ruled by AKP for the last twenty-five years. Of course, it would be quite assertive to argue that the sole reason for these defeats was the reactions of local citizens to the refugee problem that the government has created. Nonetheless, as the findings of empirical section suggests, refugees were one of the most crucial reasons, if not the most. This finding supports how domestic and transnational political dynamics are interlinked, and how changes in one lead to unexpected consequences in the other, in particular over migration governance.

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