



Original Article / Orijinal Makale

Contextual (De)Securitization of Migration in Turkish Parliamentary Debates

TBMM Tartışmalarında Göçün Bağlamsal Güvenlikleştirilmesi ve Güvenlikdışlaştırılması

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 24 February 2026

Revised: 14 May 2026

Accepted: 15 May 2026

Key words:

Contextual securitization, discourse analysis, migration, securitization, Türkiye

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale Hakkında

Geliş tarihi: 24 Şubat 2026

Revizyon tarihi: 14 Mayıs 2026

Kabul tarihi: 15 Mayıs 2026

Anahtar kelimeler:

Bağlamsal güvenleştirme, söylem analizi, göç, güvenlikleştirme, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

A significant strand of the migration–security literature approaches migration through a largely singular security discourse, an orientation that tends to obscure its articulation across different political and policy arenas. Drawing on parliamentary debates on migration in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), this article shows that migration in Türkiye is framed not through a unified security logic but across multiple security registers that vary by context. Based on qualitative discourse analysis supported by MAXQDA-assisted coding, the study traces how migration is articulated across debates on security policy, the economy, public services, social cohesion, demographic change, as well as foreign policy relations. The findings indicate that securitization and desecuritization operate through contextual reconfiguration rather than a fixed trajectory.

Cite this article as: Gökmen, E., Memişoğlu Zaimoğlu, F. (2026). Contextual (De)Securitization of Migration in Turkish Parliamentary Debates. *Yıldız Social Science Review*, 12(1), 28–39.

ÖZ

Göç–güvenlik literatürünün önemli bir bölümü göçü tekil bir güvenlik söylemi üzerinden ele almakta; bu yaklaşım, göçün farklı siyasal ve politika alanlarında nasıl ele alındığını görünmez kılmaktadır. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde (TBMM) göçe ilişkin parlamento tartışmalarına dayanan bu makale, Türkiye bağlamında göçün tek bir güvenlik mantığıyla değil, bağlama göre değişen çoklu güvenlik çerçeveleri üzerinden kurulduğunu göstermektedir. MAXQDA destekli nitel söylem analizi temelinde yürütülen çalışma, göçün güvenlik politikaları, ekonomi, kamu hizmetleri, toplumsal uyum, demografik değişim ile dış politika alanlarında nasıl konumlandırıldığını incelemektedir. Bulgular, güvenleştirme ve güvenlikdışlaştırma

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süreçlerinin doğrusal bir seyir izlemediğini; aksine bağlamsal yeniden yapılandırmalar yoluyla işlediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Atf için yazım şekli: Gökmen, E., Memişoğlu Zaimoğlu, F. (2026). Contextual (De) Securitization of Migration in Turkish Parliamentary Debates. *Yıldız Social Science Review*, 12(1), 28–39.

1. INTRODUCTION

The post-Cold War reorientation of security studies made it clear that security cannot be reduced to military threats alone. As the referent objects and sectors of security expanded, migration became increasingly entangled with security debates, not only as a matter of border control but as a field through which questions of sovereignty, governance, public order, welfare, and social cohesion are negotiated. Yet a significant strand of the migration-security literature treats securitization and desecuritization as relatively continuous processes, often assuming that migration discourse follows a unified logic across arenas. This article challenges that assumption through the Turkish case and argues that migration is articulated through multiple security registers that vary by context rather than a singular threat narrative.

As a prominent refugee hosting country, Türkiye offers a revealing setting for examining these shifts. The country's long experience with population movements, as well as its geopolitical location at the intersection of regional crises and European Union (EU) border governance, has made migration an especially salient political issue in domestic politics and foreign policy. Against this backdrop, the study asks how political actors reframe migration across different policy contexts. Parliamentary debates capture this salience in concentrated form, bringing together governance claims, partisan contestation, and competing moral and security discourses. In this setting, migration emerges as a discursive terrain through which political actors negotiate state capacity, social stability, and international responsibility.

The study argues that migration in Türkiye is not governed through a single security discourse but through transitions between multiple security logics that emerge in response to shifting political and institutional settings. While the argument is developed through Türkiye, it resonates with broader patterns observed in other transit and destination settings where migration governance blends security rationales with humanitarian and diplomatic considerations. Norman (2020), for example, demonstrates that migration policies in Türkiye and Morocco function not only as security instruments but also as tools of diplomacy. Lara (2022) similarly shows how Mexico's migration framework shifted toward securitization under external pressure and rising flows. Such cases point to migration as a domain shaped by interlinked domestic and international arenas, in which security meanings are reworked rather than simply applied.

Building on these insights, the study conceptualizes contextual securitization as the process through which security discourses are reconfigured by different actors across policy domains in response to changing historical, institutional and social conditions. This approach makes it possible to capture how securitization and desecuritization unfold not as a linear sequence but as a set of shifting articulations that move across contexts such as security policy, economy, public services, social cohesion, demographic change, and foreign policy. By focusing on parliamentary discourses, the article contributes to public policy scholarship by showing how legislative actors reframe migration through competing logics with implications for agenda-setting and decision-making in a period of prolonged displacement and political polarization.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section develops the analytical framework of contextual securitization and situates it within migration-security debates. This is followed by a section that positions Türkiye as a contextual site of migration securitization. It then outlines the research design and coding strategy. The findings section examines how migration is securitized and desecuritized across six contextual domains and compares dominant framing across political parties. The conclusion summarises the key findings and reflects on their implications for securitization research.

1.1. Analytical Framework: Contextual Securitization of Migration

For much of the Cold War, security studies centred on state survival, territorial integrity and military threat. Security was largely understood through a single referent object – the state – and a narrow threat spectrum. Post-Cold War transformations unsettled this approach, expanding security debates to include political instability, economic vulnerability, environmental crises, and migration. More importantly, security came to be understood not as an objective condition but as a socially and politically constructed category.

The Copenhagen School provided one of the most influential articulations of this shift. Challenging classical approaches centred on military threats and state survival, scholars associated with this tradition conceptualized security as a political and communicative act. They also introduced securitization and desecuritization as key analytical concepts for explaining how issues move between ordinary

politics and security domains. Buzan (1991) broadened security analysis across multiple sectors, while Baldwin (1997) emphasized that security acquires analytical meaning only when questions ‘for whom’, ‘against what’, and ‘at what cost’ are specified. Wæver’s (1995) speech act formulation further argued that an issue becomes securitized when it is framed as an existential threat and accepted as such by a relevant audience, thereby legitimizing extraordinary measures. Security thus emerges through political articulation and social recognition rather than material danger alone.

Despite its transformative impact, securitization theory has often been applied as if it followed a universal logic. Even when conceived discursively, analyses frequently presume a stable trajectory through which issues move from normal politics to emergency politics. Such assumptions risk obscuring how security is articulated differently across institutional arenas, and socio-cultural contexts.

Migration provides a critical site for unpacking these limits. Existing scholarship emphasises that migration is securitized across multiple arenas, including national and regional policy frameworks (Huysmans, 2000; Karyotis, 2007), international governance structures (Oğuz-Gök, 2016), and public discourse. Empirical studies further demonstrate that migrants and refugees are frequently associated with illegality, crime, economic burden and social threat in both media and political narratives (Van der Valk, 2003; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti, 2016; Canveren & Akgül-Durakçay, 2017; Goodman et al., 2017). Together, this literature highlights that securitization does not operate through a single logic but unfolds across intersecting discursive fields in which sovereignty, welfare, identity and public order become entangled.

Within securitization theory, political elites occupy a central position in defining and legitimizing security problems through discourse (Baysal, 2020). Migration narratives are actively constructed within political arenas, particularly through leadership rhetoric and parliamentary debate (Kabacaoglu and Memişoğlu, 2021). Parliamentary discourses therefore constitute a critical analytical site where competing threat constructions, policy priorities and moral claims intersect, rendering migration simultaneously a matter of governance, security, and social responsibility.

Within this broader field, irregular migration has become a prominent object of securitization, often invoked through narratives of border control and legality. Irregular migration can be broadly understood as border crossings, residence or employment outside formal legal frameworks (Bartram et al., 2019), a category that raises governance concerns for states while also exposing migrants to heightened vulnerability (Koser, 2007). Since the 1990s, diversified forms of irregular migration – including unauthorised entry, visa overstays, undeclared employment – have further increased the policy salience of the category and con-

tributed to its placement within security agendas (Vogel, 2016; Öner, 2021). Yet irregularity is rarely fixed. Legal statuses can shift over time, complicating measurement and governance and undermining attempts to treat irregular migration as a stable security problem governed by a single logic (Koser, 2010).

This fluidity becomes particularly visible in crisis contexts. In 2015, irregular mobility through Türkiye intensified alongside onward movement toward Europe, as people fleeing conflict – predominantly Syrians – combined irregular border crossings with claims for international protection. As documented in earlier work, this period was marked not only by increased visibility of irregular routes but also by a discursive convergence between migration, asylum and security, in which forced displacement became routinely framed through the language of crisis and control (Memişoğlu & Başol, 2015). Irregular migration and refugeehood became intertwined in political and media narratives, blurring legal categories and reinforcing securitized understandings of mobility.

Building on critiques that securitization is not solely discursive but also institutional and material (Balzacq, 2011), this study adopts a contextual approach. As McDonald (2008) asserts, security is not constructed identically across societies or political arenas but varies according to historical, cultural and institutional condition. (De)securitization emerges at the intersection of leadership discourse, institutional arrangements, public opinion, and international pressures. It operates through multiple referent objects and overlapping logics rather than a singular threat narrative, and shifts across domestic politics, foreign policy, economic governance and societal debate. Guided by this framework, the analysis focuses on three interconnected dimensions: discursive representations of migration through key concepts and themes, institutional framings embedded in parliamentary processes and state practices, and broader political, economic and social conditions shaping these constructions.

1.2. Türkiye as a Contextual Site of Migration Securitization

Türkiye offers a particularly layered context in which these dynamics become visible. Simultaneously a country of immigration, emigration and transit, this multi-positionality diversifies both the scope and direction of security discourses (İçduygu & Aksel, 2012). Its geopolitical location positions the country as a corridor between the Middle East, the Caucasus and Europe, exposing it directly to regional crises while situating it within European border governance strategies (Şemşit, 2010; Özey, 2017). Migration thus operates not only as an internal political concern but also as an instrument of foreign policy and regional positioning.

Discursively, migration in Türkiye has been framed through multiple and sometimes competing registers. In the context of Syrian displacement, official discourse for extended periods emphasized notions such as ‘guesthood’, ‘ensar-muhacir’ and ‘humanitarian responsibility’ (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022). Over time, economic pressures, political polarization and debates over border control contributed to a gradual shift toward securitizing framings centred on public order and return. Leadership rhetoric has oscillated between humanitarian and security-centred registers depending on domestic political conditions (Kabacaoğlu and Memişoğlu, 2021). These discursive shifts were reinforced institutionally through coordination among security forces, migration authorities, and foreign policy actors, while media narratives and economic anxieties further shaped public perceptions. Within this broader landscape, references associated with irregularity constituted an intensified site where border control, social order, economic concerns and protection narratives intersected most visibly.

The year 2015 represents a critical juncture in this process. It marked a period in which irregular mobility, asylum seeking and regional instability converged with electoral competition and heightened parliamentary contestation. Migration became a salient political issue not only because of displacement from Syria but also because mobility increasingly entered public debate through the language of crisis, responsibility and security. Parliamentary discussions during this period thus provide a particularly revealing window into how political actors reconstructed migration across shifting and context-dependent security logics. It is through this lens that the study examines TGNA debates from 2015, tracing how migration was alternately securitized and desecuritized across multiple policy domains. The following analysis demonstrates that migration did not move along a linear trajectory from humanitarian concern to security threat. Rather, it was continuously rearticulated through overlapping and competing frames, reflecting the contextual nature of securitization within Turkish parliamentary politics.

1.3. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design and analyses parliamentary discourse through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Given the political salience of migration and security in Türkiye, parliamentary debates provide a key site for examining how migration is framed, contested and reconfigured across shifting political contexts.

Data were drawn from TGNA General Assembly transcripts, committee reports and parliamentary speeches, enabling analysis of how migration is articulated across state discourse, political party positions and interactions between government and opposition. These sources capture both institutional framings and partisan contestation,

offering insight into the construction of migration across multiple political arenas.

The primary dataset consists of TGNA General Assembly transcripts from January 2015 onwards, covering the parliamentary debates preceding both the June 7 and November 1, 2015 general elections. As indicated earlier, this period constitutes a critical juncture, marked by intensified cross-border mobility from Syria, heightened domestic political competition and growing public debate over migration. Rather than representing a singular ‘migration crisis’, 2015 reflects a moment in which forced displacement and irregular mobility became increasingly intertwined within parliamentary discourse. Focusing on this timeframe provides a concentrated snapshot of shifting discursive dynamics at a point when migration moved to the centre of legislative debate.

Parliamentary materials were retrieved from the official TGNA online archive using keywords including migration, irregular migration, border security, return, and Syrian. This search yielded 64 parliamentary sessions, from which 76 speeches, motions and statements directly or indirectly addressing migration were identified for analysis. Texts were coded thematically using MAXQDA and analysed through CDA to capture not only linguistic patterns but also political positioning, embedded power relations and broader social effects (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Coding proceeded through integrated stages. First, texts were coded for securitization indicators, including constructions of threat, identification of referent objects and calls for extraordinary measures. Second, these codes were grouped across Buzan’s (1991) sectoral framework – military, political, economic, societal and environmental – and classified as securitizing or desecuritizing. Third, discourses were interpreted across six contextual domains: demographic shifts, security policies, economy public services, social cohesion and foreign policy relations.

MAXQDA enabled individual speeches to be coded across multiple security logics simultaneously, reflecting the contextual and overlapping nature of securitization. This approach allows the analysis to demonstrate empirically that migration is reconstructed not through a single security discourse but through multiple, domain-specific security rationalities that shift across political contexts.

2. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: CONTEXTUAL PATTERNS OF (DE)SECURITIZATION

2015 parliamentary debates period marks a critical juncture in Türkiye’s migration governance, shaped by the mass arrival of Syrian refugees alongside electoral competition, economic pressures and regional instability. Together, these dynamics produced a discursive environment in which migration oscillated between humanitarian responsibility and state-centred security concerns.

As summarised in Tables 1 and 2, political parties mobilized distinct securitization and desecuritization logics reflecting divergent ideological positions and political strategies. The ruling Justice and Development Party (the AK Party) predominantly framed migration through humanitarian responsibility, fraternity and religious solidarity, drawing on the ‘ensar-muhacir’ narrative to situate the displacement within a moral register. In contrast, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) foregrounded border security, economic burden and social disorder, framing migration as a threat to public order and societal stability. Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) articulated a counter-discourse grounded in human rights and social justice, emphasising migrants’ dignity, equality, and access to essential services. Rather than positioning migrants as security risks, HDP narratives consistently framed them as subjects of protection, contributing to processes of societal desecuritization.

These contrasting discursive orientations indicate that 2015 constituted a transitional moment in which migration was reconstructed across competing security logics. Securitization dominated many parliamentary exchanges, yet desecuritizing frames also emerged intermittently, revealing how humanitarian and rights-based narratives coexisted with state-centred security concerns. Migration thus became a contested political terrain in which human security and state security were articulated in tension rather than sequence.

Across parliamentary debates, the findings indicate that political actors alternated between securitizing and desecuritizing framings within six interrelated contexts: (1) demographic shifts and public order, (2) security policies, (3) economy, (4) public services, (5) social cohesion and (6) foreign policy. The following sections examine these contexts comparatively across political parties.

2.1. Demographic Shifts

Debates on demographic shifts were discursively linked to concerns over public order, governance capacity and social stability, and were dominated by securitizing framings advanced primarily by the CHP and MHP. The CHP mobilised political (3) and societal (3) securitization logics by linking migration flows to demographic shifts and social burden and governance failure. In a TGNA speech delivered in February 2015, a Member of the Parliament (MP) from CHP framed migration as a political and demographic threat, arguing that the incumbent government’s uncontrolled policies toward Syrian refugees had ‘triggered terrorism, human trafficking, drug trade, economic crisis and sectarian tensions’¹. By situating migration alongside organised crime and instability, migration was constructed as a security risk undermining ‘state capacity, public order and political stability’. Consequently, the CHP’s migration discourse relied on a political securitization logic, framing failures in migration governance as a political crisis threatening national unity.

The MHP similarly articulated migration as a societal security concern, emphasising migration as a demographic threat through societal securitization (2). The party emphasized that migrant inflows undermined cultural homogeneity. In a parliamentary session from January 2015, an MHP MP described the dense presence of Syrian refugees in Hatay as ‘a crowd that paralysed urban life,’ adding that ‘residents can no longer even walk on the pavements.’² Such language framed migrant presence as a disruption of everyday order, reinforcing a narrative in which demographic change was securitised through appeals to social cohesion and cultural integrity.

¹ Rules of Procedure of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. TGNA Session No: 63. date: 24.02.2015

² TGNA Session No: 41, date: 13.01.2015

Table 1. Dominant securitization logics and discursive framings by political party (2015)

Political party	Primary securitization logics	Characteristic framing of migration
AK Party	Political– Military	Migration is framed as an indicator of state capacity within border security and regional stability agendas, closely associated with irregular flows, national security and counter-terrorism narratives. Humanitarian responsibility is mobilised alongside strategic security discourse.
CHP	Political – Economic – Societal	Migration is constructed as a governance problem producing economic strain, pressure on public services and social instability, with emphasis on unemployment, rising costs and weakened state capacity.
MHP	Economic – Political – Societal	Migration is framed as a demographic and identity-based threat undermining social order and national sovereignty, foregrounding cultural disruption and concerns over public order.
HDP	Political – Environmental	Migration is articulated as a political crisis rooted in war and foreign policy, emphasising human dignity, environmental risk and state responsibility while challenging state-centric securitization narratives.

AK Party: The ruling Justice and Development Party; CHP: Republican People’s Party; MHP: Nationalist Movement Party; HDP: Peoples’ Democratic Party.

Table 2. Dominant desecuritization logics and discursive framings by political party (2015)

Political party	Primary desecuritization logics	Characteristic framing of migration
AK Party	Societal	Migration is framed through humanitarian responsibility, fraternity, and social cohesion, keeping it within ordinary politics and legitimizing assistance through moral and religious references rather than threat narratives.
CHP	Societal – Political	While generally securitizing, CHP discourse occasionally cautions that exclusionary policies may intensify social unrest, framing limited desecuritization around social stability and governance concerns.
MHP	Societal	Desecuritization appears only sporadically, primarily through humanitarian references to Turkmen kin communities, within an otherwise dominant securitizing framework.
HDP	Political – Societal	Migration is consistently desecuritized through appeals to human rights, equality and coexistence, positioning migrants as subjects of protection rather than sources of threat.

AK Party: The ruling Justice and Development Party; CHP: Republican People's Party; MHP: Nationalist Movement Party; HDP: Peoples' Democratic Party.

By contrast, the HDP adopted a desecuritizing discourse grounded in human security (2). Rather than framing migration through demographic risk, HDP MPs highlighted gender-based violence, exploitation and rights violations affecting migrant women (coding category: gender and demography).³ HDP interventions emphasised migrant women's right to life and dignity, shifting attention away from border control toward protection and social justice. This framing positioned migrants, particularly women, not as sources of threat but as subjects requiring protection, marking a clear departure from state-centred security narratives. Taken together, debates in this context reveal how demographic change became politicized through competing security logics: while CHP and MHP framed migration as a threat to political stability and social order, the HDP framed it through a humanitarian and rights-based perspectives.

2.2. Security Policy

The security policy context constitutes the domain in which state-centred securitization was most explicit. Across party lines, migration was predominantly articulated through its association with irregularity and embedded within narratives of border security, terrorism, and national sovereignty, although the intensity and emphasis differed. As demonstrated in Table 1, the intensity and modality of securitization vary significantly across political actors. While political and military securitization dominate parliamentary debates, desecuritizing interventions remain comparatively limited and are largely confined to HDP discourse, as indicated in Table 2.

Within this domain, the AK Party articulated migration primarily through political (6) and military (5) securiti-

zation, frequently linking irregular crossings and border control to regional instability. By positioning migration – particularly in its irregular forms – alongside cross-border threats stemming from DAESH and similar organizations, the AK Party embedded mobility within a strategic security framework⁴. Migration management was thus constructed as a matter of state security and military preparedness, legitimising measures such as the mandate's extension.

The MHP demonstrated a strong tendency toward political (4), military (3) and societal (2) securitization, positioning migration as a threat to national sovereignty and identity. In February 2015, in the aftermath of the evacuation of the Süleyman Şah Tomb on 22 February and amid intensifying criticism of the government's Syria policy, an MHP MP described Syrian refugees in Adana as creating an “environment of chaos” and warned that the city stood “on the brink of social explosion.”⁵ This speech was delivered at a time when the advance of DAESH in Syria and the rapid increase in the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey—approaching 1.5 million—had brought issues of national security and social cohesion to the forefront of the political agenda. Within this context, the metaphor of “explosion” constructed migration as an imminent destabilizing force, implicitly associated with uncontrolled entry and framed as a direct threat to public order and national integrity. Therefore, this discourse was not confined solely to the issue of migration; rather, it was articulated within a broader security conjuncture shaped by Syria policy, the threat of terrorism, and concerns over border security.

The CHP combined political (6) and economic (3) securitization within this context. Border control was framed not only as a matter of national security but also as a pre-

³ TGNA Session No: 1, date: 01.10.2015

⁴ TGNA Session No: 9, date: 03.09.2015

⁵ TGNA Session No: 64, date: 25.02.2015

requisite for economic stability. In February 2015, a CHP MP argued that migration had “increased unemployment, doubled or tripled rents and placed local merchants in a difficult position.”⁶ The speech was delivered in the immediate aftermath of two major security developments: the violent 6–7 October 2014 unrest, which had resulted in over forty deaths, and the evacuation of the Süleyman Şah Tomb on 22 February 2015 amid DAESH advances in Syria. These events intensified public debate on terrorism, border governance, and the government’s Syria policy. Within this heightened security atmosphere, the MP described the presence of nearly 1.5 million Syrian refugees as creating an “environment of chaos” and warned that certain cities stood “on the brink of social explosion.” Migration was therefore not framed merely as an economic burden; it was associated with uncontrolled entry, rising crime, informal networks, and the potential infiltration of terrorist actors. Although economic grievances—such as unemployment and rising rents—were emphasized, they were articulated within a broader internal security narrative. Weak border governance was implicitly constructed as enabling destabilization, while the concentration of Syrians was portrayed as threatening public order and social cohesion. Thus, the speech intertwined political and internal security securitization with economic concerns, situating migration within a broader conjuncture shaped by terrorism, border instability, and the post-6 7 October 2014 unrest.

The HDP, by contrast, engaged in limited military (2), societal (2) and economic (2) securitization while simultaneously advancing a desecuritizing discourse that challenged the criminalization of migrants. Within the broader security policy debate, the HDP advanced a counter-securitizing discourse that rejected the framing of migration as a threat. In a parliamentary motion, HDP MPs addressed Syrian refugee children not as security subjects but as victims of war, emphasizing their forced displacement and vulnerability⁷. By shifting the referent object from the state to human dignity and universal rights, the party sought to remove migration from the realm of emergency security governance and reposition it within a humanitarian and political responsibility framework.

These securitizing framings intensified particularly in the context of electoral competition, increasing public anxiety following the 6-7 October 2014 unrest, and institutional concerns over border governance during the expansion of DAESH in Syria. Parliamentary actors strategically mobilized migration discourse not only to address mobility itself but also to contest governmental legitimacy, state capacity and crisis management. In this sense, securitization functioned as a mechanism of political positioning shaped by broader domestic and regional pressures.

2.3. Economic Context

In debates on economy, securitization shifted from territorial integrity to material stability. Here, irregular migration was framed less through military metaphors and more through economic insecurity, primarily by the CHP and the MHP.

The CHP articulated migration as an economic burden (4) by associating it with unemployment, inflation and public expenditure. Party discourse emphasized ‘pressure on the local labour force’ and ‘rising social spending’. In February 2015, amid heightened security concerns following the 6–7 October 2014 unrest and the continued expansion of DAESH along the Syrian border, the CHP articulated migration primarily as an economic burden while embedding it within a broader internal security narrative. Addressing the TGNA, a CHP MP argued that the Syrian population in Gaziantep—approaching 400,000—had “increased unemployment,” suppressed wages through cheap labour, and intensified “economic, social, health and housing problems.”⁸ The speech linked rising unemployment, business closures, and labour displacement to the influx of Syrians, portraying migration as exerting structural pressure on local markets and public services. Thus, while the CHP foregrounded labour market pressures and public expenditure strain, migration was simultaneously situated within a broader conjuncture shaped by border instability, the Syrian civil war, and the perceived expansion of extremist groups. In this context, migration was constructed as a destabilising force affecting both local economic balances and internal security structures. By emphasising labour displacement and strain on public finances, the CHP constructed migration as a destabilising force in local economies.

Similarly, the MHP framed migration as both an economic and identity-based threat through economic (7) and societal (2) securitization. The speech, delivered in January 2015, took place in a period marked by heightened tensions along the continued presence of DAESH in northern Syria. Border provinces such as Hatay were experiencing a visible increase in Syrian settlement, which had become a focal point of public debate concerning local commerce, security, and state authority. Within this context, themes of “economic burden” and “unfair access to state resources” recurred frequently. An MHP MP argued that Syrian refugees operating informal businesses in Hatay—particularly in Reyhanlı and Antakya—had undermined local commerce by opening shops without bureaucratic procedures, taxation, or regulatory compliance.⁹ This was contrasted with Turkish shopkeepers who faced extensive licensing requirements and financial obligations. The narrative constructed Syrians as benefiting from regulatory asymmetry, thereby generating unfair competition and deepening resentment among local

6 TGNA Session No: 63, date: 24.02.2015

7 TGNA Session No: 92, date: 23.04.2015

8 TGNA Session No:58, date: 19.02.2015

9 TGNA Session No 42, date:14.01.2015

merchants. The discourse further implied that prolonged Syrian settlement could alter local social balances, warning that social unrest and “economic explosion” were possible outcomes. Although the immediate focus was on trade and small business regulation, migration was embedded within a broader security atmosphere shaped by border instability and weak governance. Thus, migration was framed simultaneously as an economic security issue—threatening livelihoods and local markets—and as a catalyst for societal tension, capable of undermining social cohesion and public order.

Informal labour markets and the distribution of public resources reinforced the framing of migration as a problem of economic and administrative control. These discourses were further shaped by growing societal pressures linked to unemployment, housing costs and economic uncertainty, enabling migration to be articulated not merely as a demographic phenomenon but as a broader source of socio-economic instability. Consequently, economic securitization operated not through a singular threat construction but through context-dependent reconfigurations connecting material insecurity, governance practices and political struggle. This pattern is consistent with Table 1, where CHP and MHP discourses are predominantly associated with economic and societal securitization logics.

2.4. Public Services

In debates on public services, securitization of migration was framed primarily through its perceived impact on education, health and housing. Here, securitization centred on resource allocation and institutional capacity, with parties oscillating between threat narratives and humanitarian concern.

The CHP emerged as the most securitizing political party in this domain, combining political (6), economic (5) and societal (5) frames. Party discourse emphasised that migrants ‘strained public resources’ and increased pressure on local services. At the same time, the CHP articulated a rights-based counter-frame, emphasizing equal access to public services and criticizing discriminatory practices toward specific refugee groups. Rather than portraying migrants as a threat, the party framed unequal treatment as a potential source of social tension, thereby shifting the focus from migrants themselves to state responsibility and governance practices. In this sense, the CHP’s discourse¹⁰ did not securitize migration directly; instead, it suggested that exclusionary policies and unequal access to services could generate instability, implicitly locating the source of risk in governance failures rather than in migrants themselves.

The MHP similarly framed public services through political (4) and economic (3) securitization, portraying migration

as a burden on state resources. Yet some interventions also revealed moments of humanitarian awareness. For example, an MP drew attention to the conditions of Syrian refugees in Osmaniye Cevdetiye refugee accommodation centre, noting that ‘8-12 people shared 15-square-metre tents’, sewage flowed openly and water and electricity cuts were frequent.¹¹ Although embedded within an otherwise securitizing discourse, such descriptions introduced humanitarian suffering into debate on service provision, illustrating the multi-layered nature of migration narratives.

By contrast, the AK Party adopted a predominantly desecuritizing approach in this context, presenting access to housing, health and education as evidence of state responsibility and social solidarity, producing societal desecuritization (4). An MP from AK Party emphasized that Syrian refugees benefited from free public services, framing migration as a moral commitment rather than a threat to public order.¹² As reflected in Table 2, desecuritizing interventions emerged primarily through societal frames emphasizing equality, solidarity and access to services.

The HDP further reinforced desecuritization by emphasising equality and rights. For example, an MP from HDP questioned why the Directorate of Religious Affairs provided education to migrant children while the Ministry of Education remained relatively inactive, highlighting unequal treatment based on ethnicity and religion.¹³ Through societal desecuritization (4), such interventions reframed public services as a matter of equal opportunities rather than security. Overall, public services emerged as a key site where societal security was negotiated, revealing tensions between resource-based securitization and rights-based desecuritization.

Debates on public services reveal that migration was securitized through broader struggles over governance capacity, institutional responsibility and social distribution. In the context of increasing electoral polarization and public sensitivity toward resource allocation in 2015, political actors mobilized migration discourse to contest the state’s ability to manage welfare provision, housing, education and healthcare infrastructures. Institutional practices surrounding service delivery, refugee accommodation and bureaucratic coordination became central to these debates, shaping perceptions of both state competence and social fairness. At the same time, growing societal anxieties regarding unequal access to public resources, deteriorating living conditions and local service pressures intensified the political salience of migration. Consequently, public services functioned as a key contextual domain in which securitization and desecuritization intersected through competing constructions of social justice, state responsibility and societal stability.

¹¹ TGNA Session No: 64, date:25.02.2015

¹² TGNA Session No: 64, date: 25.02.2015

¹³ TGNA Session No: 82, date: 26.01.2015

¹⁰ TGNA Session No: 53, date:10.02.2015

2.5. Social Cohesion

The social cohesion constituted one of the most polarised domains of migration discourse, exposing sharp inter-party divergence over belonging, identity, and coexistence.

The AK Party framed migration through narratives of cohesion and brotherhood, producing strong societal desecuritization (6). When addressing the TGNA in February 2015, an MP from AK Party described refugee policies as a ‘humanitarian duty’ and ‘bond of brotherhood’, emphasizing shared religious and cultural ties.¹⁴ By legitimizing public spending through moral and religious references, the AK Party portrayed migration as strengthening social unity rather than threatening cohesion.

The CHP adopted a more ambivalent position in this period, combining moderate political (3) and societal securitization (3) frames. The speech, delivered in January 2015 amid ongoing border instability following the 6-7 October 2014 unrest and the continued expansion of the Syrian conflict, situated Gaziantep as “the most adversely affected province” in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis¹⁵. The MP emphasized that the presence of hundreds of thousands of registered and unregistered Syrians had placed the province under strain, implicitly linking migration to growing social and administrative pressures. Rather than employing overt threat rhetoric, the discourse framed migration as a structural factor destabilizing local balance, particularly in terms of governance capacity, social cohesion, and resource distribution. By highlighting the scale of both documented and undocumented Syrians, the MP suggested weak regulatory control and administrative overload, thereby embedding migration within a broader narrative of border vulnerability and uneven state response. In this sense, migration was constructed less as a humanitarian issue and more as a governance and societal stability challenge.

The MHP articulated the strongest securitization in this domain (economic 4, societal 3, political 3), linking migration to the weakening of ‘Turkish identity’ and local order. An MP from MHP described refugees as generating economic decline, infrastructural strain and cultural disruption, constructing migration as a localized crisis threatening both societal cohesion and national integrity.¹⁶

Conversely, the HDP foregrounded coexistence, dignity and human vulnerability, advancing a form of societal desecuritization (5). In a TGNA speech delivered in April 2015¹⁷, amid heightened security debates following the 6-7 October 2014 unrest and ongoing discussions on internal security legislation, the HDP Group Deputy Chair emphasized the need for a shared and equal future grounded in solidarity rather than exclusion. Syrian children were described as “cold,

hungry and exposed,” forced to flee a war created by others and abandoned to what was termed a “shame on humanity.” Rather than framing migration as a destabilizing force, the speech located insecurity in war, poverty, and structural injustice. The referent object shifted from the state and national identity to children’s dignity and fundamental rights. By rejecting narratives that associated refugees with disorder or threat, the HDP reframed migration through collective responsibility and moral accountability. Thus, social cohesion emerged as a central discursive arena in which migration was alternately constructed either as a threat to societal balance by other parties or, in the HDP’s case, as a call for inclusive coexistence and equal citizenship. In this formulation, insecurity was not attributed to migrants themselves but to exclusionary policies and systemic inequality.

In the context of increasing electoral polarization and public sensitivity toward resource allocation in 2015, political actors mobilized migration discourse to contest the state’s ability to manage welfare provision, housing, education and healthcare infrastructures. Institutional practices surrounding service delivery, refugee accommodation and bureaucratic coordination became central to these debates, shaping perceptions of both state competence and social fairness. At the same time, growing societal anxieties regarding unequal access to public resources, deteriorating living conditions and local service pressures intensified the political salience of migration. Consequently, public services functioned as a key contextual domain in which securitization and desecuritization intersected through competing constructions of social justice, state responsibility and societal stability.

2.6. Foreign Policy

In the foreign policy context, migration acquired dual significance as both a security risk and a diplomatic instrument.

The AK Party framed migration through international burden-sharing and regional responsibility, combining political (2) and military (3) securitization with elements of societal desecuritization (2). An MP from AK Party highlighted Türkiye’s ability to accept 24,000 refugees in two days – contrasting this with Europe’s remarkably slower response in five years – thereby presenting migration management as evidence of state capacity and geopolitical leverage.¹⁸

The CHP addressed foreign policy matters with reference to border security failures, producing military (2) and political (1) securitization. In a speech, a CHP MP criticized what was described as a “faulty Syria policy” and an “unrealistic and insincere refugee policy,” arguing that the government’s external miscalculations had directly contributed to instability¹⁹. Referring to the presence of approximately 1.8 million Syrians in Turkey, the MP contended that the

14 TGNA Session No: 64, date:25.02.2015

15 TGNA Session No: 46, date:22.01.2015

16 TGNA Session No: 68, date: 03.03.2015

17 TGNA Session No: 92, date: 23.04.2015

18 TGNA Session No: 9, date: 03.09.2015

19 TGNA Session No: 9, date:03.09.2015

fact that many refugees were forced to embark on “journeys of death” across the sea constituted a collective political responsibility. Rather than framing refugees themselves as the source of threat, the discourse securitized state mismanagement and border governance failures. The referent object was national credibility and territorial control, while the locus of insecurity was located in flawed foreign policy choices. By linking irregular departures and unsafe maritime crossings to inadequate policy planning, the CHP embedded migration within a broader narrative of weakened border security and diplomatic miscalculation.

The MHP similarly constructed migration as a strategic security issue, producing discourses of political (2), military (2) and economic (1) securitization. When addressing the parliament in month 2015, an MHP MP criticized the AK Party’s ‘strategic depth’ and ‘zero problems with neighbours’ doctrine, arguing that it had exposed Türkiye to regional instability and weakened diplomatic standing.²⁰ Migration was framed not merely as humanitarian fallout but as evidence of jeopardizing economic and international reputation loss.

The HDP approached migration through political (3) and environmental (2) securitization, alongside limited political (1) and societal (1) desecuritization. MPs linked refugee flows to the devastation caused by the Syrian conflict, describing cities and displaced populations as outcomes of political decisions.²¹ At the same time, HDP interventions highlighted environmental and spatial risks in border regions, referring to mortar shells falling into residential areas, the destruction of agricultural land.²² Through this framing, migration was articulated as both a political crisis and a threat to human and environmental security. Across parties, migration thus functioned simultaneously as a symbol of geopolitical vulnerability, diplomatic positioning, and security risk.

In the context of the Syrian conflict and increasing international pressure surrounding refugee mobility toward Europe, migration became deeply embedded within broader disputes over Türkiye’s regional strategy and diplomatic positioning. Parliamentary actors mobilized migration discourse not only to address cross-border mobility itself but also to contest governmental legitimacy, foreign policy credibility and the state’s capacity to manage regional instability. Institutional concerns regarding border control, refugee governance and international burden-sharing further reinforced the securitization of migration within foreign policy debates. Simultaneously, growing societal anxieties related to territorial security, regional conflict spillover and diplomatic isolation intensified the political salience of migration. Consequently, migration functioned not merely as

a humanitarian issue or external policy challenge, but as a context-dependent security discourse through which geopolitical vulnerability, national prestige and state authority were continuously renegotiated.

3. CONCLUSION

This study examined the securitization of migration in Türkiye through parliamentary debates during 2015, demonstrating that migration governance operates through multiple, context-dependent security logics rather than a unified threat framework. Across six interrelated analytical domains – demographic shifts, security policy, economy, public services, social cohesion and foreign relations – migration was alternately securitized and desecuritized, revealing a dynamic discursive landscape shaped by political competition, institutional practices and shifting societal pressures.

The findings show that political parties articulated migration through distinct security registers. The ruling AK party primarily framed migration in relation to border control, regional stability and state capacity, while simultaneously mobilizing humanitarian narratives grounded in moral responsibility. The CHP emphasized economic burden, pressure on public services and migration governance failure, constructing migration as both a political and material crisis. The MHP foregrounded demographic risk, social order and national identity, advancing the most consistent societal securitization. In contrast, the HDP articulated a counter-discourse centred on human dignity, environmental risk and political responsibility, persistently challenging state-centred security framings.

These patterns confirm that securitization of migration debates in Türkiye unfolds as a contextual process shaped not only by perceived threats but also by electoral dynamics, economic uncertainty and foreign policy matters. Migration discourse functioned simultaneously as a site of governance justification and political contestation, revealing securitization to be not merely a state reflex but a mechanism of legitimacy production within parliamentary politics.

The Turkish case also illustrates the increasing entanglement of security and humanitarian discourses. Migration was framed both as a moral obligation through appeals to fraternity and solidarity, and as a security concern through narratives of border control, public order and return. This dual configuration produces a hybrid migration rhetoric in which humanitarian responsibility coexists with security-oriented approaches. While such flexibility allows space for desecuritization within pluralistic political arenas, it also risks normalising exceptional measures and marginalizing migrants as political subjects.

Conceptually, the study advances a contextual securitization approach that moves beyond linear models of threat construction. By showing how migration is reconstructed

20 TGNA Session No: 40, date: 08.01.2015

21 TGNA Session No: 65, date:26.02.2015

22 TGNA Session No: 72, date:09.03.2015

across overlapping domains, the analysis points out that securitization operates through shifting configurations rather than stable trajectories. Security emerges not solely through discourse but through the interaction of political actors, societal anxieties, and international pressures. Treating migration as a fixed security problem thus obscures how political contexts actively shape policy responses, often producing inconsistent and contradictory outcomes. Instead, security could be understood as a multi-level and contingent process embedded in domestic politics and regional power relations.

Future research could extend this contextual perspective by examining media narratives, local governance practices and community-level perceptions, further illuminating how security meanings circulate beyond parliamentary spaces. Such work would deepen understanding of migration not as a singular threat but as a dynamic social field through which the boundaries of security are continually redrawn.

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