

RESEARCH REPORT

**APPROACHES TO
AND PERCEPTIONS
OF FOREIGN
POLICY IN TURKEY
2022**

DECEMBER 2022-008

RESEARCH REPORT

**APPROACHES
TO AND
PERCEPTIONS OF
FOREIGN POLICY
IN TURKEY
2022**

DECEMBER 2022-008

PROJECT TEAM

DR. PINAR SAYAN
DR. CİHAN DİZDAROĞLU
EDGAR ŞAR

PROJECT ASSISTANTS

BERFİN ÖZYAN
GİZEM BAYGÜN

AKADEMETRE
RESEARCH & STRATEGIC PLANNING

We would like to thank Akademetre
for their contributions to the data
collection efforts under this project.

■■■ HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG
DERNEĞİ TÜRKİYE
TEMSİLCİLİĞİ

We would like to thank Heinrich
Böll Stiftung Association Turkey
Office for their contributions to
this project.

All rights reserved. This research or any part of it cannot be reproduced by electronic or mechanical means without the explicit permission of Istanbul Political Research Institute.

The views expressed in this study reflect the authors' views and may not, completely or partially, represent the views of Istanbul Political Research Institute or Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association Turkey Office.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

- 5 -

Introduction

- 8 -

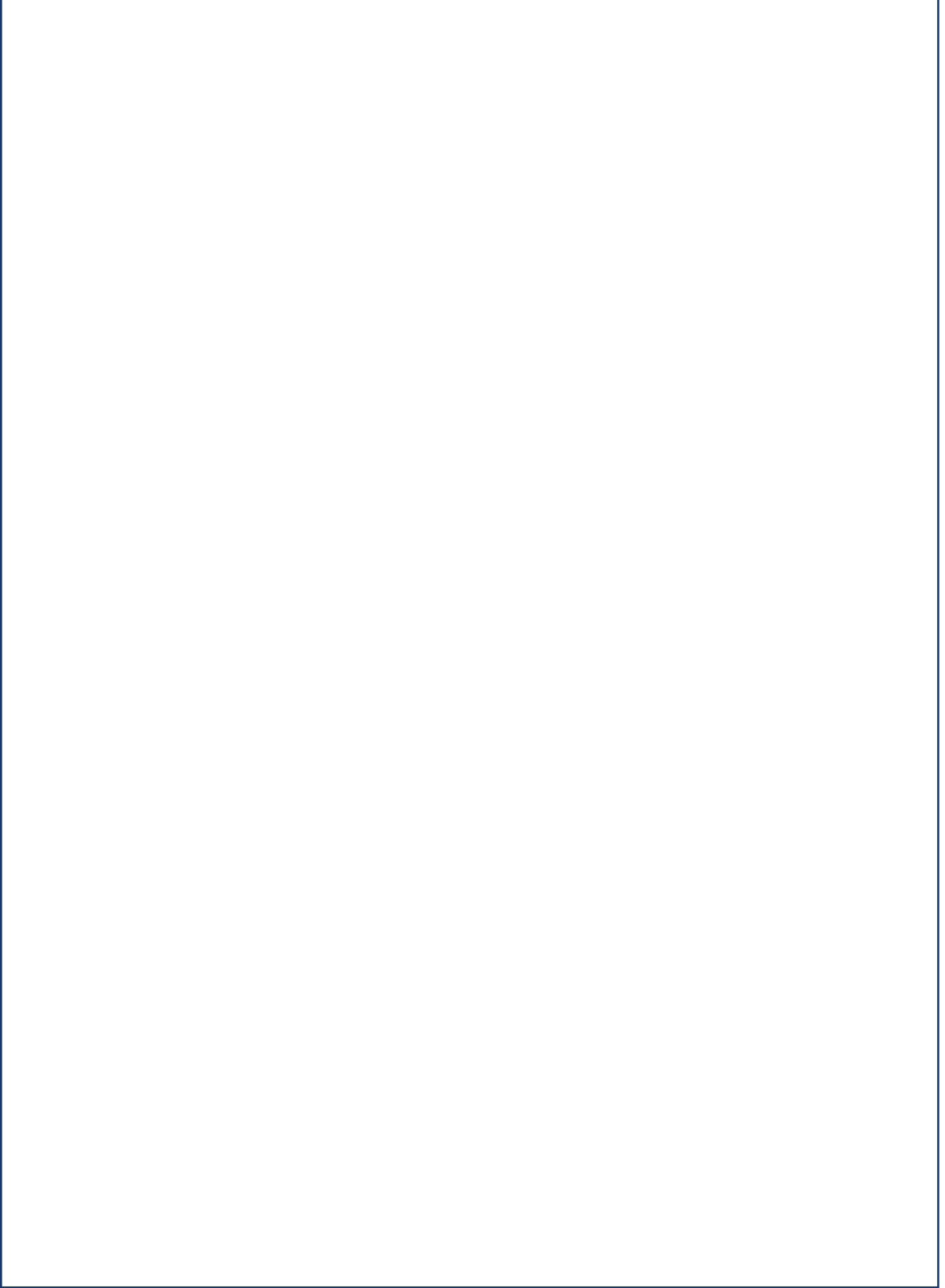
Key Findings

- 10 -

Conclusion

- 23 -

4 APPROACHES TO AND PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY IN TURKEY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ‘Approaches to and Perceptions of Foreign Policy in Turkey’ research project is led by the Foreign Policy team at Istanbul Political Research Institute (IstanPol). Within the scope of the project, overall perceptions and attitudes on Turkey’s foreign policy among voters of the ruling and opposition parties are analyzed.

The research was conducted through a qualitative method via focus group discussions, with a total of 48 participants who were divided in eight focus groups, each with six participants. The research company AKADEMETRE conducted the discussions in a face-to-face format in Istanbul, by using the set of questions designed by IstanPol.

Within the scope of the research, participants’ views on Turkey’s major problems, overall perceptions on foreign policy, favored solutions to problems, cross-border operations of the Turkish Armed Forces, Turkey’s EU and NATO membership, and the Russia-Ukraine war were investigated and analyzed.

MAJOR PROBLEMS

During the focus group discussions, voters of both the ruling and opposition parties raised the economy, inflation and migration among the major issues facing Turkey. Particularly on the subject of economy, all participants were, unlike last year, more likely to describe the problem with tangible examples. It should also be underlined that voters of the ruling Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (People’s Alliance) stated that the ruling coalition may struggle to get votes from young people in the 2023 elections.

Only one of the six focus groups raised foreign policy as one of Turkey’s major problems, while asylum-seekers/migrants, as in the previous year, emerged as a hot topic in all groups as a matter of domestic and foreign policy. Voters of opposition parties particularly raised problems related to poor management, injustice, nepotism, etc.

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF FOREIGN POLICY

An analysis of the approval for Turkey’s foreign policy among the focus group participants has revealed that voters of the People’s Alliance, the ruling block, believe that Turkey’s foreign policy is successful, while the voters of the opposition have a rather negative view of foreign policy. Successful areas of foreign policy, according to participants, include advances in the defense industry, developments in armed and unarmed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAVs) technology, and Turkey’s strong and respected position in the international arena. Voters of the İYİ Parti (Good Party) in particular frequently and distinctively mentioned advances in the realm of defense industry.

All groups considered migrants/asylum-seekers as a failure of foreign policy as last year and main concerns raised in relation to this subject were essentially based on cultural, economic and security issues. Partici-

pants refer to migrants/asylum-seekers as a problem mainly because of economic reasons, such as the impact of hosting a considerable population of migrants/refugees, the disturbing behaviors of asylum-seekers/migrants, uncertainty about how long migrants/refugees might stay in Turkey, risk of demographic change, increasing rent costs in housing, and unemployment.

Similarly, increasing foreign dependency and property sales to foreigners are other striking areas that participants considered as failures. Voters of both the ruling block and opposition parties shared similar criticisms and recommendations to address these issues. Women participants, in particular, criticized Turkey's isolation in international politics and its increasing external dependence.

Perceptions over whether Turkey has a 'strong' stance in foreign policy is a fundamental issue that differentiates voters of the ruling block from those of opposition parties. Voters of the ruling party Justice and Development Party (AKP) in particular claimed that Turkey has a robust and respected position in international politics, although some voters of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), an ally of the ruling AKP, rejected this claim, as did voters of opposition parties. These groups instead described Turkey's style in foreign policy as aggressive.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN POLICY

The most frequently cited recommendations to address the question of migrants/asylum-seekers, that participants considered as the most fundamental problem in both foreign and domestic policy, were improving relations with the Syrian government, closing the door to new migrants/asylum-seekers, returning migrants/asylum-seekers currently living in Turkey and boosting border security. Participants in focus group discussions also highlighted that property sales to foreigners should be subjected to specific preconditions.

Voters of opposition parties also recommended adopting a more cautious stance in foreign policy, ensuring economic growth and reducing foreign dependency.

PERCEPTION OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

In parallel to last year's findings, participants in the focus group discussions stated that Turkey does not have any friends but has many enemies in the international arena. The most cited enemies included the US, Israel, Russia, and Greece; however, several participants also recognized that Turkey must also forge close ties with these countries at times, despite the fact that they are considered as threats or enemies.

Participants listed Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Qatar among the friends of Turkey, but they also admitted that the relations with these countries are based on self-interest.

CROSS-BORDER DEPLOYMENT OF TURKISH ARMED FORCES

The majority of the participants, primarily voters of the ruling block, were supportive of cross-border military operations of the Turkish Armed Forces when it comes to border security.

Several supporters of opposition parties believed that the military has lost its strength or criticized the deployment of troops to regions which do not share borders with Turkey.

It should be emphasized that women participants had a more negative and critical opinion on military operations.

ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NATO MEMBERSHIP

Participants in the focus group discussions had positive opinions about Turkey's potential EU membership because of the chances it offers of better living standards and a higher level of development. However, some participants were critical of the delay in full membership. There were also some participants who were opposed to joining the EU, arguing that Turkey must be an independent country.

In contrast to our 2021 research, many participants shared positive opinions about NATO, which was a hot topic on Turkey's agenda after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While participants had negative or no comments about the organization last year, a striking change in general opinion was observed this year. In fact, the majority of participants were supportive of Turkey's membership of NATO.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Participants in the focus group discussions shared concerns about Russia. The majority argued that Turkey must remain neutral and act as a mediator in the con-

flict. Some participants saw the war as an opportunity for Turkey in foreign policy, while others, particularly voters of opposition parties, believed that the ruling block was using the conflict to serve their own interests.

MISINFORMATION

As was the case last year, some focus group participants, particularly voters of the ruling alliance, expressed misinformation and conspiracy theories about foreign policy, mainly including false information about the Russia-Ukraine war, NATO and the Lausanne Treaty.

INTRODUCTION

This research report, which has been conducted for a second time by the Istanbul Political Research Institute (IstanPol) Foreign Policy Program, aims to offer an understanding of diverse perspectives on foreign policy by voters of different political parties and insight into voters' approaches towards foreign policy-related matters.¹

In contrast to quantitative studies that has been conducted to identify public perceptions of foreign policy, this report is based on qualitative data collected via focus group discussions with small samples. Forty-eight people participated in eight focus group discussions that were formed as homogenous or heterogeneous groups in accordance with their political party affiliations.

With the upcoming 2023 general elections in Turkey, the linkage of foreign policy with domestic political settings and its use in internal affairs have rendered the public opinion and perspectives on foreign policy even more significant than before. Although foreign policy issues are not at the top of the agenda for voters, they still deserve attention due to their indirect impact on citizens and the current blurred line between domestic and foreign policy. In this context, this research focuses on perspectives on Turkey's major problems in foreign policy, including perceptions of friends and enemies in international politics, Turkey's relations with EU and NATO, and cross-border military operations resulting from the militarization of Turkish foreign policy. The report first offers a detailed description of the methodology and profile of participants, followed by research findings summarized in eight sections.

METHODOLOGY AND PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The research was conducted by IstanPol in cooperation with AKADEMETRE, through a qualitative method via focus group discussions in order to develop an in-depth analysis of the approaches and perceptions about foreign policy issues. AKADEMETRE carried out the face-to-face focus group discussions in Istanbul between June 13-19, 2022, using the set of questions designed by the IstanPol research team.

The researchers held eight focus group discussions with 48 participants distributed into groups of six. All participants were above the age of 18. Although there are multiple social fault lines that shape perceptions and opinions on foreign policy in Turkey, participants were selected to include supporters of the ruling block, the People's Alliance, and voters of opposition parties, since opinions on the ruling government is one the key axes of polarization that characterize public opinion. Table 1 offers detailed information on the profiles of the participants of each of the eight focus groups. Participants were chosen with due consideration for a balance in terms of political affiliation, gender, age and economic status. However, the data collected during the research cannot be generalized for the sectors of the society represented by participants' profiles due to

TABLO: ODAK GRUP KATILIMCILARININ DAĞILIMLARI

| | Group | Gender | Age | Number of Participants |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Ruling Block (People's Alliance) | Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (2) | Women (3) + Men (3) | 35 and below | 6 |
| | Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (2) | Women (6) | Above 35 | 6 |
| | Voters of AKP (4) + MHP (2) | Men (6) | Above 35 | 6 |
| Opposition | Voters of Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) (2) – The Good Party (İyi Parti, İYİP) (2) – People's Democratic Party, (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) (1) – Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi, DEVA) (1) | Women (3) + Men (3) | 35 and below | 6 |
| | Voters of CHP (2) – İYİP (2) – HDP (1) – DEVA (1) | Women (6) | Above 35 | 6 |
| | Voters of CHP (2) – İYİP (2) – HDP (1) – DEVA (1) | Men (6) | 35 and above | 6 |
| Hybrid | Voters of AKP (1) + MHP (1) + CHP (1) + İYİP (1) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1) | Women (3) + Men (3) | Above 35 | 6 |
| | Voters of AKP (1) + MHP (1) + CHP (1) + İYİP (1) + HDP (1) + DEVA (1) | Women (3) + Men (3) | Above 35 | 6 |
| TOTAL | | | | 48 |

the adopted methodology. As such, the research focuses on offering an in-depth analysis of opinions and convictions of particular groups in society, rather than revealing public opinion overall in Turkey.

There was an even gender distribution across all participants in the research. Thirteen participants (27%) were 35 years of age or younger, and 35 (73%) were older than 35. Thirty-one participants (64%) were actively employed at the time of the research, while 16 (36%) were housewives and one respondent was retired. Eleven participants were single and the remaining 37 were married.

The focus group discussions were led by moderators and lasted 90-120 minutes. With the consent of participants, the audio of the discussions was recorded, and subsequently transcribed and anonymized by AKADEMETRE staff. NVivo software was used by IstanPol to analyze different answers given to the same questions in different focus groups and to identify meaningful patterns observed with voter groups or demographic characteristics. These patterns are addressed below in comparison to last year's research findings and with supporting examples.

KEY FINDINGS

THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS OF TURKEY

As in 2021, all focus groups in 2022 seemed to be in consensus about what constituted ‘Turkey’s most important problems’. As a matter of fact, in all groups, the most frequently cited issues in response to this question included the economy, education, inflation and migration. Concrete examples shared by participants to describe the deterioration of their living standards have been more evident in this year’s research. Although foreign policy was directly mentioned as a problematic area by only one group, the issue of migrants/asylum-seekers² (as detailed in the next chapter) was often cited in all groups as a matter of both foreign and domestic policy. An emphasis on “poor governance and injustice” was also evident in the focus group discussions, particularly with opposition voters, which echoed last year’s findings.

“In the current system, we don’t have any problems other than the economy. The government can’t handle this, it can’t represent the citizens, so there is a lack of trust in the government. The perception of trust in one person is collapsing now... The citizens now just care about their wallets and pockets. They get more and more frustrated when they go to the supermarket and can’t afford to buy the things they want to buy.” (Male, 35, MHP)

“The economy is the only agenda. In fact, the conditions of people like us, people from the middle class, are getting worse, while the rich are getting richer. This is how I interpret it. I am the breadwinner of my household, and I find it really difficult. They have to do

something. I also vote for Tayyip Erdoğan.” (Female, 27, AKP)

“[The ruling party] shouldn’t frustrate the people. They say, ‘Buy less meat, eat simit.’ I will eat simit while you eat steaks.” (Male, 35, MHP)

“I also say the economy because I am a tenant. I have three children who go to school and my husband is the only person with a job in my household. The children have many needs, and we cannot satisfy them by any means. We are struggling economically. The children see their friends, some of whom are better off, of course. When they say ‘Mom, my friend bought this, why can’t we buy it’ I hang my head down and I don’t know what to tell them.” (Female, 37, MHP)

“Education is the most important thing, and justice depends on education. The economy can be turned around somehow. Uneducated people are trying to manage the judicial system.” (Female, 37, AKP)

“I believe it is due to a lack of education that we have this level of economic crisis. If there was a truly proper education system from primary schools to higher institutions, we wouldn’t be in this situation.” (Female, 45, İYİ Parti)

“Education and the economy. Without education, you can’t have a properly working economy. Students at primary schools can’t learn anything else than the topics covered by high school entrance exams. Then they go to university. So, they don’t learn anything until they go to university. I don’t see any children

participating in social activities. The second issue is the economy. Of course, you can't have a good education if you don't have a good economy. Everything relies on the economy. It also affects education. The two are interconnected. (Female, 55, DEVA)

In another striking finding, the supporters of the ruling block, the People's Alliance, said the ruling parties will find it difficult to attract young voters due to the economic problems emerging while the elections of 2023 loom:

"They point to 2023, we will see what happens then. They say we will draw on our resources, but I think the state [AKP] will lose significant support by then. Members of Generation Z are not intending to vote for them, and the party needs to invest in young people." (Female, 43, AKP)

"It's the same for the judicial system. Why is it that the courts can't close cases in 6 months? The system works so slowly, but the Generation Z is fast. They are losing Generation Z because they can't manage the process like this. If the system could deliver results, AKP can attract them... Generation Z has seen all challenges. Back in our days, we were more comfortable. They have seen the pandemic. They have seen the coup. They have seen everything. They know everything. When the Mayor of İstanbul was elected, he received votes from all the young people because he said the cost of student's passes for public transport would be discounted by 50%. I witnessed that. Therefore, the party and the state must invest in young people. We are now set in cement, but they aren't. You send your child to school, and they can't afford to buy anything from the supermarket. Everyone blames the state. So, the state must first reach out to them." (Female, 37, AKP)

Although specific issues, including poor management, injustice, nepotism, etc. were more often cited by opposition groups, there was also some discontent among voters of the People's Alliance:

"They don't want to give up power because the main problem is nepotism. I can say this for anyone – for example, as a supporter of MHP, I can say it for Devlet Bahçeli. I can also say it for Süleyman Soylu. Those who get a position then try to get more powerful so they can

keep their positions forever. There are also problems in foreign policy. They could be addressed if we had competent people." (Male, 35, MHP)

"I believe there is a lack of education, economy and injustice. We want to speak up, but we can't. We need to raise our voices, but we don't do that for fear of civil war." (Female, 39, CHP)

"I think the most important problem is the domestic challenges caused by migrants and asylum-seekers. And there are the recent price hikes. As a person who has been voting for 20 years, I say people's rights have been violated. They are so thick-skinned that they don't see anything. There is significant disorder in this country. It's like we are in the hands of a few contractors." (Male, 41, DEVA)

"The most important problem for me is having extremely poor management under the rule of one man. There is strong partisanship. There are those who are paid three or four salaries. The Ministry of Finance or the head of the Central Bank are assigned without considering their competencies. They don't know anything. They speak to the media like comedians. They say things like we will go to space. This is an extremely poor management. We don't know where all the taxpayers' money goes. They transfer it abroad, the greater part of it is wasted. They have the media, they have the television and most of the people believe what is told." (Male, 50, CHP)

"Our most important problem is that we are not properly managed, they only pretend as if." (Male, 60, CHP)

"They say technically there is no inflation. They say the cost of living is high. If the cost of living is high, why don't you take action as the president? I believe the one man's rule is a very important issue for our country. There is no transparency. For me, the most important issue is the poor management under the rule of one man." (Male, 50, CHP)

"There is the problem of having the rule of one man. One can't know everything, including the economy, etc. You can't be an expert on everything. The policies he implements are wrong, the people he puts in charge are wrong." (Male, 36, HDP)

Similar to last year's findings, another problem raised by the voters of HDP was the perceived weakness of opposition parties:

"The country's first problem is the people, the second one is the opposition, and the third one is the government. We wouldn't be going through this if the people didn't support the government. And the opposition can't do anything, they can't come together. I became more sympathetic towards HDP because some opposition parties completely exclude HDP. They don't have anywhere else to go, so they need support. If this government is to be taken down, it can't be taken down without HDP." (Male, 42, HDP)

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF FOREIGN POLICY

The focus group participants were also asked about their overall opinions on Turkey's foreign policy and the government's successes and failures in international politics. Voters of the ruling block stated that the government's foreign policy is successful, and particularly highlighted the advancing defense industry and achievements in armed and unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles, echoing similar comments in 2021. Another success of the ruling block as emphasized by participants was Turkey's perceived strong and respected position in the international arena. Similarly, opposition voters, particularly supporters of İYİ Parti, also mentioned the advances in defense industry among the successes of the ruling alliance. Nevertheless, opposition voters in general have a more negative perspective on the government's performance in foreign policy.

The main failure of Turkish foreign policy as stated in all groups was in dealing with migrants/asylum-seekers,

followed by increased foreign dependency and property sales to foreigners. Turkey's foreign aid efforts targeting other countries was a concern among the young voters of the ruling block according to last year's research; however, none of the participants raised this issue this year.

"I believe in addition to the UAVs, we will discover our resources in the Mediterranean. I believe the government is doing very well in that area. I think we have made much better progress than other countries. Whatever we want to do, we do it without asking anyone." (Female, 37, AKP)

"I don't see any problems in foreign policy. Everything is great. I think Mr. Tayyip [Erdoğan] gave us a voice. And now our UAVs are standing out. We are doing well in foreign relations and we are far ahead of other countries." (Female, 55, AKP)

"We are ramping up our efforts in the defense industry at an unprecedented level – I can never complain about that. I wish we had done this earlier. We already have a defense industry. No one can stop us as long as we have food and weapons. We achieved this in the defense industry, and we are moving further ahead. We need to do everything without depending on foreign countries." (Female, 43, İYİ Parti)

There is a consensus among both opposition and ruling block voters about the problem of migrants/asylum-seekers, and the main

concerns raised by participants were essentially based on cultural, economic and security concerns. Among the reasons for considering migrants as a problem, participants mentioned the large population of migrants, their disturbing behaviors, uncertainty about how long they will stay, security problems, changes in demographics, increases in housing rent levels, the inflation rate, unemployment and other economic issues.

The main failure of Turkish foreign policy as stated in all groups was in dealing with migrants/asylum-seekers, followed by increased foreign dependency and property sales to foreigners.

“The demographic structure is undermined, but I believe our country has been forced into this. Things have got out of control – they are taking pictures of our women and acting in aberrant ways on public transport – they must be stopped. This has gone beyond Syria. We see different people dressed like executioners.” (Male, 35, MHP)

“I’m really furious about the Syrians and Afghans. They need to leave. As people say, they will banish us from here. They say it’s their country. I’m against calling them citizens – he [Erdoğan] did something good but it has created a disease. They are isolating us.” (Female, 26, AKP)

“They were formerly called asylum-seekers. If there is a war in a neighboring country, you defend your people. There is no war in Syria, and he [Erdoğan] recruited these men for the army and he told them to come here. Beyond that, men are walking from Afghanistan and Pakistan and arrive here. This is migration, not asylum. ...I support MHP and it’s ridiculous to talk about this. You have to talk about this behind closed doors. Defending Turks is MHP’s most important principle - people vote for them because of their nationalist and idealist views but you compromise with your principles. The provincial governor of Hatay says 150 of every 200 newborn babies are Syrian babies. It’s really tormenting Turkey will be Arabized.” (Male, 35, MHP)

*“There are so many Syrians living on my street that are all looking for a place to live in and rent. Prices have been doubled because of them. Multiple Syrian families share the same flat so even if the realtor asks for 5,000 TRY, they can still afford it. Maybe they are good people, but I hate them... Things were much better before. Tayyip [Erdoğan] brought them here but it would have been much better if he hadn’t.” (Female, 37, MHP, **emphasis added**)*

“I am not pleased to see that they can live so comfortably in our country. They can enter our country freely. There are too many black people living on my street. They have a very different lifestyle. Mr. Tayyip [Erdoğan] should send these people back just like he let them in. The civil war in Syria is none of our business. We both sent our troops, and we took in their men. They had children

here while we fought and lost our soldiers. Their time is up, so why don’t they go back? So many of them got Turkish citizenship. Was it you or them that won this country? Yes, I support Erdoğan, but I can criticize his bad deeds just as much as I can see his good deeds. I am strongly against foreigners.” (Female, 45, AKP)

“I think the most important problem is the migrants. It all started with them coming to Turkey. Everything began with their arrival. They share their flat with four other families, but I don’t - how can I afford the same rent levels as them with the minimum wage? The cost of living has gone up. I had to sell my house and rent a flat because my husband’s business started to fail.” (Female, 35, DEVA)

“I can’t live at the same standards as them, they have a more luxurious life than me. And they don’t pay taxes. They share the same flat with 30 people.” (Male, 36, MHP)

“Syrians have their own grocery stores and all. They sell their own goods like their chips. How do these goods come to Turkey? This means there is manufacturing activity in Syria. Then, why are you here?” (Female, 35, DEVA)

“The increasing refugee population in our country; feeling worried when sending [our children] to the grocery store. I can’t send my children anywhere; I’m afraid.” (Female, 42, CHP)

“We can do business or trade with Arabs but living together with them is a different story, because their socio-economic situation and their psychology are different from ours. As a Turkish citizen, I don’t even want to dine at the same restaurant with an asylum-seeker. I don’t like their culture. I use public transport and I see them shouting. We shouldn’t open our country to everybody. If I can’t just go to Germany, if I need to take a test to go there, people coming here should also take a test.” (Male, 52, MHP)

“Their people come here. The rich live a high life, and the poor accost women. This is disruptive and disturbing.” (Female, 54, İYİ Parti)

“They opened their own grocery stores, their own supermarkets. They have signs in Arabic. How did we end up in this situation?” (Male, 52, MHP)

“Refugees. More and more are coming. Things were different six or seven months ago. There wasn’t such a big increase. We have major problems concerning foreign affairs. The people will not listen to any excuses if they can’t afford to buy basic food items. That’s it.” (Male, 50, CHP)

Another criticism raised by all groups was the sales of properties to foreigners, which was also emphasized in last year’s findings. Participants emphasized that more cautious policies must be adopted in relation to this problem and suggested that such sales must be restricted or prohibited.

“As the lady mentioned, 283,000 people received citizenship. They are selling them the most beautiful places; they are selling the places where we can’t even afford a cup of tea. I am against land sales to foreigners. People think Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is giving [citizenship] to win more votes. Süleyman Soylu said that they identified several thousand neighborhoods, and they were going to reduce it by 20 percent... It’s not exclusion; we are a conscientious country. When someone throws stones at us, we throw roses in return. There must be a restriction – they can choose a specific settlement, or a region and they can all gather there. I don’t want to condemn or humiliate anybody. Their lifestyle is different. In my building, 16 or 17 of them live in the same flat – and they are too loud. Their clothes don’t look right; I ask myself whether I am the one who is a foreigner. I went to Sultanbeyli with my friend, and I thought I was in Syria. All the shop signs are in Arabic in Fatih district.” (Male, 35, AKP)

“Just like we are required to offer assurances when we want to travel to a European country, we should have asked them to offer similar assurances before they were accepted, or they should have been kept in refugee camps. I think they [the government] couldn’t manage this process very well. I still believe the ruling party is strong – this is the only problematic area they have.” (Female, 37, AKP)

“Maybe they were very good at building these bridges, hospitals, workplaces, etc. under the Build-Operate-Transfer model. However, they turned this into another opportunity and bought the most valuable lands in Turkey. All of the beautiful places are now owned by foreigners. They were sold by someone; the Qataris bought them from someone.” (Female, 45, AKP)

“I don’t see anything successful. I would congratulate the ruling block if they were successful, but we sold everything and filled the whole country with foreigners. If I had the chance, I would leave – I wouldn’t stay here. In the past, we could stay out at the park with my 4-year-old son until midnight but now we’re afraid. Syrians and Afghans are everywhere. And everything is expensive now, so people have started shoplifting. He [Erdoğan] says they built hospitals, but we can’t even get an appointment to see a doctor. He says they built highways, but I can’t drive on those highways, I can’t buy gas. So, I can’t see any accomplishments” (Female, 39, CHP)

“The Qataris are buying our land. We had a funeral two days ago. We went to the Nişantaşı Mosque. I looked at the people around – it’s terrible. The beauty and the people of Nişantaşı in the old days are gone. The Arabs are everywhere; the clothes displayed in stores are long-sleeved and not stylish.” (Female, 54, İYİ Parti)

“We are asking for money from the countries we disparaged in the past. A while ago we were speaking ill about Israel, and then their prime minister visited Turkey. We disparaged the United Arab Emirates, and now we are asking them for money because our treasury is empty. These are very complicated issues, so I’m not going into details. I don’t think they are successful. All of our land has been, and are still being, sold.” (Male, 50, CHP)

“And there is this thing about selling citizenship. Anyone who has 100,000 USD or 200,000 USD can buy a house and Turkish citizenship.” (Male, 29, İYİ Parti)³

“Turkey makes it look like it’s doing very well in foreign policy, but the result is zero. Turkey’s closest friends in foreign policy are Arab countries, that is, Qatar. Much land in Turkey is bought by Arabs and Qataris. I’d rather have no foreign policy than have this kind of foreign policy.” (Female, 36, İYİ Parti)

“If this trend goes on, if it continues after 2023, I will completely change my opinion. If they keep giving out citizenship, if the refugees stay here and they trample over us, I will vote for MHP.” (Female, 26, AKP)

As was the case in the 2021 research, participants also commented on the linkage between domestic and foreign policy, and particularly female participants raised their concerns about Turkey’s isolation in international politics and its increased foreign dependency.

As was the case in the 2021 research, participants also commented on the linkage between domestic and foreign policy, and particularly female participants raised their concerns about Turkey's isolation in international politics and its increased foreign dependency.

"We first need to resolve our domestic problems. I believe things, hopefully, will be better." (Female, 37, DEVA)

"We don't have any value in international politics because our currency does not have any value." (Female, 35, DEVA)

"We are not a producer. Consumption is too high, but production is too low. There is no balance between income and debt, but you can say, for example, that we manufacture and export UAVs. As the old saying goes, 'be afraid when goods become more expensive.' Transporting firms buy gasoline, and the price of that is reflected in the prices of goods at the supermarket. We need to address this in a holistic way." (Male, 35, MHP)

"If there is no production, we will always be dependent on other countries and be their slaves." (Female, 36, HDP)

"As a country, we need to produce. Let's produce, why don't we? Everything grows in our lands. We need to progress in order to decrease our external dependence." (Female, 28, AKP)

"As long as we're dependent on foreign countries, we will be destitute. There is a war between Ukraine and Russia, and we are begging Ukraine for wheat.

We are begging for sunflower oil." (Male, 53, HDP)

"Our administration has more holes than Swiss cheese. We're dependent on other countries in all areas. We have no successful policies. My district is run by an AKP municipality, and I appreciate their work. But in general, there is nothing successful in terms of administration." (Female, 42, CHP)

"I think we're becoming isolated. Tayyip [Erdoğan] believes everyone is supporting us but there is nobody supporting us. When something happens to Turkey, everyone looks for a place to hide like a rat. For example, Russia is a Christian country, not a Turkish-Muslim country. Why should I help a country that doesn't believe in the same religion as me? When you are a Muslim with a conscience, you are obliged to help everyone. I believe we are becoming isolated as a country." (Female, 27, AKP, *emphasis added*)

Whether Turkey has a 'strong' stance in foreign policy was an important dividing point among participants. Voters of the ruling block generally argued that Turkey has a strong and respected position in foreign policy. However, several voters of the ruling alliance who support MHP, as well as opposition voters, stated that Turkey doesn't have a strong position, and described Turkey's style in foreign policy as aggressive. They also emphasized that Turkey's harsh stance in foreign policy is just for show, and that its consequences were not positive for the country.

"Our president has a persistent stance; when he makes a commitment, he never takes a step back. He does he wants to do without asking anyone. He does all that without bowing to anyone, which has really helped advance our country." (Female, 43, AKP)

Whether Turkey has a 'strong' stance in foreign policy was an important dividing point among participants.

“I don’t think we are failing in foreign policy. To be honest, I think we are in a better position compared to the past. We are doing better in terms of prestige and standing.” (Female, 36, AKP)

“I like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, he has a strong stance. It’s good that he can stand up to anyone.” (Male, 35, AKP)

“Until now, have you ever seen a leader in foreign policy who can telling off the others while riding tall in the saddle? Recep Tayyip Erdoğan can do that. He can tell others to come to their senses. This is a sign of courage and a matter of self-confidence. It shows that he gets his strength from something - his nation... He is a strong character, and he has a say in foreign policy.” (Male, 35, AKP)

“I don’t find it successful. We are following the wrong strategy and we are focused on our interests. The government had to buy the S-400 system – it was forced to. When they went to Russia, they found the doors closed, and were kept waiting in chairs. We didn’t see a strong stance there. He said he would be the peace ambassador in Ukraine, but he couldn’t do it.” (Male, 35, MHP)

“I can’t see anything positive. Slamming your fist on the table is not bravery. The government is rebelling against everybody.” (Female, 36, HDP)

“I don’t think they are handling foreign policy very well. You can’t achieve things just by yelling and shouting. Their voters think ‘Our government is standing up to them.’ He rebels against the US, and

three days later we hear that we have sold something to the US, or we have given them something. The news reports don’t show the details. They just show the yelling and challenging.” (Female, 55, DEVA)

“I think some acts of the government were wrong. To be honest, when you rant and rave, the results can be bad.” (Male, 28, CHP)

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN POLICY

As migration emerged as the most important foreign policy problem during focus group discussions, the recommendations for solutions were also focused on improving relationships with Syria, refusing to accept new migrants/asylum-seekers, deporting migrants currently living in Turkey and boosting border security. These recommendations were similar to those collected in last year’s research.

The recommendations emphasized by opposition voters included drafting a more moderate policy, economic development, addressing foreign dependency and improving ties with Germany, the US, and other countries.

“Turkey’s foreign policy is based on saving the day. In the Middle East, the government has to revise its Syria policy and start talks with [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad. The bottom line is changing the nature of relations with Syria, otherwise you can’t

send back Syrians.” (Male, 27, HDP)

“I think we should first fix our ties with Germany. Germany is always the mediator, and we have citi-

The recommendations emphasized by opposition voters included drafting a more moderate policy, economic development, addressing foreign dependency and improving ties with Germany, the US, and other countries.

zens living there. To make sure that they don't have any problems related to security, we need to resolve our problems with Germany. We have fertile lands, but we don't produce anything. We are dependent on other countries. It's like being a parasite. We need to import everything. We should first boost our production at home and become a self-sufficient country. We need to improve the value of our currency. Our currency doesn't have any value." (Female, 35, DEVA)

"The value of our currency should be improved, and we need to resolve our domestic issues. We have the problem with migrants, and now we have to solve that." (Male, 27, HDP)

"Military spending is not what it seems. You need a good economy for this. We need to build peace and understanding both inside and outside Turkey." (Male, 28, CHP)

"It will be better if he [Erdoğan] manages to be more moderate towards other countries. They are trying to undermine us. We need to show this stance. We are doing something wrong but I don't know what it is exactly. Something does not feel right. Hopefully it will be better. We are going through a difficult time. We are in a challenging time for the future of children. Young people want to go abroad. I don't know if we are being ungrateful or if we are making a mistake without knowing." (Female, 44, MHP)

In addition, recommendations about property sales to foreigners were also shared by voters of the ruling block and opposition parties. Participants urged the government to end this policy or apply certain restrictions in these transactions.

PERCEPTION OF "FRIENDS" AND "ENEMIES"

Participants of the focus group discussions were asked to list the friends and enemies of Turkey. The objective of these questions was not to encourage binary thinking or prejudices, but to understand to what extent the associations created by these words were being questioned and thought about. The first reactions were broadly focused on the idea that Turkey does not have any true

friends but has many enemies in the international arena. Although the US, Israel, Russia and Greece were more often cited among the enemies, several participants also emphasized that Turkey fosters good relations with these countries at times and should continue to do so. The participants said these countries were considered as enemies because they were not Muslims or they don't want Turkey to become stronger, among other reasons. The participants this year had a similar approach as the participants in 2021, who emphasized foreign policy must be based on interests rather than classifications of friends or enemies. In fact, the top countries listed among friends were Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Qatar. However, several participants stated that the friendly relations with these countries were also based on interests, which was also a key finding in the 2021 research.

The top countries listed among friends were Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Qatar. However, several participants stated that the friendly relations with these countries were also based on interests, which was also a key finding in the 2021 research.

"Azerbaijan is also under a one-man-rule, just like us. And there are trade relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey. If it is disrupted, Azerbaijan would also become an enemy... It's about interests." (Male, 53, HDP)

"Whoever said 'Turks don't have any other friends than Turks' said it right. Of course, Azerbaijan helps us during war, but they wouldn't help us if we didn't help them. These things go both ways. So, I think

none of these countries are our friends. All of them are rooting against each other.” (Female, 37, CHP)

“I don’t have any friends, Turkey doesn’t have any at all. They are all opportunists, self-seekers, and only looking out for themselves. Imagine that we come to odds with a Muslim country like Azerbaijan. It can even happen between people, who shouldn’t it happen between countries?” (Female, 27, AKP)

“I see the world as Turkey and the others. We are at the top of all Turkic countries. If we didn’t exist, they wouldn’t exist. Even Azerbaijan gets its strength from Turkey. As long as we have our president, Azerbaijan will be with us. As long as we are strong, they will be on our side.” (Male, 36, MHP)

*“I think it’s temporary. You call Assad ‘a brother’ and then you end up in today’s situation. The same thing happened with [US President Joe] Biden. We know what happened in Libya and Israel. It’s all so obvious. It depends on your interests. Eating your own words doesn’t make it right. A person leading a country should make sound and clear decisions. Why did we give that first reaction to the Khashoggi case? In foreign relations, bygones are bygones. This is the path we must follow. We should never see any country as a true friend, or sworn enemy. If it protects Turkey’s interests, that country is a friend to me.” (Male, 42, AKP, *emphasis added*)*

Several participants, particularly opposition voters, believe that animosity against Turkey is a result of the foreign policy style of the government:

“I think we are deluding ourselves. As long as we act in accordance with the international system, don’t act like a bully, and no one messes with one another, we can get along with anyone.” (Male, 27, HDP)

“We need to change and stop trying to act so cunning. We need to show that we mean well. Protecting our rights is one thing, but our president always has an aggressive tone. We won’t let anyone oppress us but it’s necessary to be more understanding sometimes. If we had a kind but firm policy, we would have more friends.” (Male, 50, CHP)

*“[Hostility] has to do with the ruling party and its relations with others; it is caused by a management style that is based on constant aggression.” (Female, 42, CHP, *emphasis added*)*

Several participants, particularly opposition voters, believe that animosity against Turkey is a result of the foreign policy style of the government.

“There are only agreements with Arab countries in our foreign policy. They give out citizenship to them. They think this is the solution to our problems. There are conflicts in Greece, we see it on the news. We are not getting a proper flow of information. All things considered, we do not have a proper foreign policy. We are already so conflicted inside, all of this feels like a waste of time. I don’t think this is politics.” (Male, 36, HDP)

CROSS-BORDER DEPLOYMENT OF TURKISH ARMED FORCES

Participants were asked for their views on the operations carried out by the Turkish Armed Forces beyond the borders of the country. Most of the participants seemed to support the operations of the Turkish Armed Forces beyond the borders when it comes to border security. As in the 2021 research, it is noteworthy that especially among the voters of the ruling bloc, these operations were interpreted as a demonstration of Turkey’s power.

On the other hand, there are opposition voters who thought that the army is weakened, or who criticize

sending soldiers to non-border regions. Similarly, just like last year, female participants had a more negative and critical perspective attitude towards cross-border military operations.

“A display of power is something that needs to happen. Turkey is in a state of failure. Other countries also need to do the same.” (Female, 36, AKP)

“Of course, the military was stronger in the past. Soldiers lost their power as they clashed with politicians.” (Male, 35, MHP)

“Soldiers don’t have their old presence and strength anymore. The military used to have an atmosphere of its own. People used to get a little scared when it was on the news.” (Male, 41, DEVA)

“If there is a situation that threatens our borders, the intervention of the Turkish Armed Forces in countries close to our borders (such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq) is important; there are UAVs now. What is the point of [intervening] far beyond our borders, like in Libya or Afghanistan? Such things were done during the Ottoman period. This expenditure should be used to improve the minimum wage instead. They don’t think about the citizens, it’s such a pity. By all means, let’s fight for the homeland, but why should we care about someone else’s homeland?” (Male, 52, MHP)

It is seen that the criticism of the Turkish Armed Forces’ cross-border operations, especially from women, is formed around martyred soldiers:

“Most MPs do not send their children to the military, but us common folk do. Of course, anything for our homeland, but what is the point? Don’t send

your child to the military, let the innocent villager’s child go. Trust me, this is as painful to me as if my own child died. Our citizens shouldn’t die just because someone needs to show off. I will not send my child. If I had the opportunity, I would also leave this country.” (Female, 38, CHP)

“If there is a cross-border operation to protect my country, let it be done. But don’t do it to support the Syrians. They have their own internal affairs. I’m not talking about paid military service. Privates became sergeants without knowing anything and they went on duty. My child doesn’t even know how to hold a gun and he was going to the borders to fight. I was devastated.” (Female, 45, İYİ Parti)

“I don’t support it. Why should my soldier die there? It makes me very sad to see the money and soldiers go to waste.

Their martyrdom for Syria makes my blood boil. You can’t see a flag in a villa, it’s always in the house of the poor. Even before paid military service was a thing, they were sending the poor to the border, to the east.” (Female, 36, HDP)

“I also do not support cross-border operations and the martyrdom of so many young men. There can be no justification for this.” (Female, 42, CHP)

“Why should my child, nephew, or my relatives go to someone else’s borders? I supported my nephew so that he could do paid military service. People are now disinclined to do their military service. Do you think it’s easy to raise a child? I’m glad I don’t have a son. How can I raise a child, send him off to the military, and then simply hang a flag on my window when I get the news that he was martyred?” (Female, 54, İYİ Parti)

Just like last year, female participants had a more negative and critical perspective attitude towards cross-border military operations.

"I don't want soldiers to die. We should not go outside our own borders unless necessary. I feel sorry when I hear the news of martyrs because of Syria or other countries." (Female, 37, DEVA)

ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NATO MEMBERSHIP

In the focus group discussions, participants were also asked about their opinions on the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While there was generally a positive approach towards EU membership in terms of improving the standard of living and the level of development in Turkey, participants also criticized the delay in the membership process. On the other hand, participants who had a negative perception of the issue emphasized that Turkey should remain independent.

In the 2021 research, while participants stated that they did not have much knowledge or idea about NATO in general, those who did express their opinions stated that they found NATO to be unnecessary or suggested withdrawal from NATO. This year, the perception of NATO, which has occupied the agenda in Turkey for a long time because of Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO came to the fore after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has changed. Although criticized by some participants, voters of both ruling and opposition parties expressed that Turkey should remain a member of NATO.

"Sure, [EU membership] will make us thrive." (Male, 35, AKP, *emphasis added*)

"We should be a member of the EU, but I think it is already too late. We need to move with the times so we can rise and be strong." (Female, 31, CHP)

"[Turkey's NATO membership] is absolutely essential, it keeps us safe." (Male, 35, MHP, *emphasis added*)

"I wish we could defy NATO like Russia or not need NATO at all, but it is necessary for us right now." (Female, 28, AKP)

"I think EU membership is 100 percent necessary. We should definitely remain a member of NATO. It is a shield of protection as we are a very war-prone country." (Female, 35, DEVA Party)

"Exiting NATO is not in our best interest. We can stay in NATO to protect the balance of power." (Male, 27, HDP)

"When will we enter the EU? If we are planning to do so, we should do it already. Of course, we must also have a presence in NATO as a member." (Female, 35, İYİ Parti)

"There is no need to enter [the EU] since they have not accepted us for a long time, and they will not accept us in the future. We could do with or without NATO. The pres-

ence of NATO gives us military strength and they can support us as a foreign power." (Male, 29, İYİ Parti)

"Now there is some talk going on about exiting NATO or something. Exiting NATO means something like this. I lived in Russia for 6 years, I know this very well. I know that Russia has aggressive tendencies towards Turkey. It will attack instantly. Yes, it will attack instantly. NATO is a shield. Exiting NATO means becoming vulnerable to Russian attack." (Male, 42, HDP)

Although criticized by some participants, voters of both ruling and opposition parties expressed that Turkey should remain a member of NATO.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

In line with the foreign policy agenda, participants were also asked about their opinions on the Russia-Ukraine war. While participants particularly expressed their concerns about Russia, there were also those who thought that the Russia-Ukraine war creates an opportunity for Turkey in foreign policy. Similarly, some voters of the opposition party shared their belief that the government is using the war for its own benefit.

“We already have a ton of problems of our own right now. There is an economic problem in our country. Prices increase because there is no money. It doesn’t make sense to me to go to war. Now there are psychological and spiritual wars. It doesn’t make much sense to fire missiles anymore. What makes sense is to be on the side of the strong.” (Male, 37, AKP)

“The call to stop the war still continues. I think this is the most sensible option. This war must stop as soon as possible, and agricultural areas must start operating; not to mention that we import from there. People have become refugees. There are close to 6 million Ukrainian women and children who seek refuge in other countries. It’s not pleasant at all. Our current policy is the best. The whole world is calling for a stop to the war. We should not interfere too much and put ourselves in a tough spot.” (Male, 36, MHP)

“Russia and Ukraine are among the countries which we have the most commercial relations with. I watched all of these negotiations. Negotiators of both Ukraine

and Russia are planning to hold the negotiations in Turkey. It is a good thing for us that they both want Turkey. It is very important for these negotiations to be held in Istanbul and Antalya. It’s not an option for us to be enemies with Ukraine or Russia because we have serious deals. Russia is definitely at fault in this war, Ukraine was deceived. We’ve had a constructive approach. As a nation, we stand for peace. We have a fine attitude, and it should stay that way.” (Male, 36, AKP)

While participants particularly expressed their concerns about Russia, there were also those who thought that the Russia-Ukraine war creates an opportunity for Turkey in foreign policy.

“It is good that Turkey is a mediator in this war. It’s not in anyone’s interest to piss off Russia. It makes sense for us to remain as a mediator.” (Female, 35, DEVA)

“It is important to be a mediator. The problem of Ukraine needs to be solved. It affects us too. The situation should be

further improved.” (Male, 27, HDP)

“It was absurd for us to come out and act as a mediator when there are such big names like America and Germany. It didn’t make me feel glad that we are doing this.” (Female, 54, İYİ Parti)

*“He advertised himself there. There is no such thing as bad publicity. It has nothing to do with Turkey, it is his [Erdoğan’s] own advertisement.” (Female, 55, DEVA, **emphasis added**)*

“We have no business meddling in anyone’s internal affairs. Let them deal with each other.” (Female, 45, İYİ Parti)

“Who are you to mediate between Russia and Ukraine? Mind your own business.” (Female, 46, İYİ Parti)

Mediation is crucial. The government did its best to bring the delegations of the two countries together. The wheat crisis will begin, but the country is doing its best.” (Male, 38, DEVA)

MISINFORMATION ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY AND RELATED ISSUES

As in the 2021 research, one of the highlights of the research this year was the prevalence of misconceptions among participants regarding foreign policy and views resembling conspiracy theories. While mistakes regarding immigrants/asylum-seekers frequently appeared in the research last year, this year’s focus was on misconceptions about the Russia-Ukraine war, NATO, and the Lausanne Treaty. As in the previous year, it has been determined that the majority of misinformation was raised in the focus groups with voters of the ruling bloc.

“How can there even be a 100-year deal? They will make news stories about our own boron mines in 5-10 years. 100 years is too much. Tayyip Erdoğan says 2023.” (Male, 35, AKP)

“I have hope. There is talk of ending the Lausanne Treaty in 2023. I’m researching, I’m looking into it, I hope it will go well.” (Female, 28, AKP)

“I heard that the Armistice of Mondros is ending, so there has been some concern about the straits and the world is very afraid because we will be freer. We will be able to extract our own resources and we will be strong. They want to threaten us with corruption and civil war; they have started a civil war in all Muslim countries, and, in my opinion, they think it’s our turn. I think we are under threat from this point of view. While we are on our way to becoming an independent country, they want to block our way.” (Female, 43, AKP)

As in the 2021 research, one of the highlights of the research this year was the prevalence of misconceptions among participants regarding foreign policy and views resembling conspiracy theories.

“Allah has written in the Qur’an that the Third World War will break out. It is nearly time. We will fight Israel and the United States of America.” (Male, 35, AKP)

“I support [NATO membership]. They actually took us in, but [former Turkish Prime Minister Bülent] Ecevit refused.” (Female, 45, İYİ Parti)

“It looks like there is a war in Ukraine. Russia seems to be fighting, but I don’t know if there is something else behind it. It could be war or simply a diversion. They are trying to influ-

ence our wheat purchase, there are farmers in Turkey. I am wondering if it’s all a script.” (Male, 52, MHP)

CONCLUSION

The research ‘Approaches to and Perceptions of Foreign Policy in Turkey, 2022’ was conducted to examine the perceptions and approaches of voters of ruling and opposition parties towards foreign policy in Turkey. *IstanPol*, in cooperation with *AKADEMETRE*, conducted eight focus groups with 48 participants between 13-19 June 2022. The participants’ general view of Turkey’s problem areas, such as their perspectives on foreign policy, perceptions of friends and enemies, opinions on cross-border operations, and approaches to the European Union and NATO membership, were analyzed in depth within the scope of the research.

As stated in the introduction, this report focuses on the in-depth analysis of the views of the participants towards the questions within the scope of the research. It does not aim to make generalizations about particular social groups. Contrary to quantitative research found in the literature, this research was conducted using the qualitative method of focus group discussions. Its findings provide data for both the existing literature and forthcoming discussions held before the 2023 elections. As this research revealed, while the priorities of citizens are shaped by the economy, inflation and education, foreign policy is mostly of indirect relevance to citizens. This situation may be considered normal given the limited level of knowledge of citizens on foreign policy issues. However, in an environment where the lines between domestic and foreign policy are increasingly blurred, it is inevitable that foreign policy decisions will affect citizens. In this framework, the data provided by the focus group discussions will help to understand citizens’ perceptions of foreign policy.

Polarization across supporters of the government and of the opposition, which is the main axis of polarization in Turkey, was reflected in the focus group discussions. The main areas where divergence was evident were the foreign policy performance of the government and Turkey’s stance in the international

arena. While participants who supported the ruling bloc expressed their support for the government on these issues, supporters of opposition parties had a more critical approach. However, supporters of opposition parties did express their support for cross-border operations, especially when it comes to the defense industry and border security. It can also be noted that most criticisms on this subject were levelled by female participants. Despite the aforementioned divergences, voters of both the ruling and the opposition blocs tend to agree on the major problems, especially on the issue of immigrants/asylum-seekers and the perception of friends and enemies.

As emphasized in the report, regardless of the voter group, all participants stated that they see the economy, inflation, education and immigrants/asylum-seekers as among Turkey’s most important problems this year. As a natural consequence of the direct impact of economic problems on the welfare of the citizens, foreign policy issues did not make it to the top of the agenda. However, foreign policy issues are indirectly mentioned by participants through the topic of immigrants/asylum-seekers. The main concerns about immigrants/asylum-seekers mentioned in the focus groups were the high number of immigrants/asylum-seekers, their disturbing behavior, uncertainty over the duration of their stay in Turkey, the security problems they create,

the change in demographic structure, and the impact on economic problems such as rent increases, inflation, and unemployment. At the same time, it has been determined that the recently increasing practice of obtaining citizenship through the purchase of property elicited negative reactions from participants.

Looking at general perceptions towards foreign policy, voters of the ruling bloc especially find the foreign policy of the government to be generally successful. Progress in the defense industry plays an important role in this. Opposition voters also praised Turkey's significant achievements in the defense industry, especially concerning UAVs technology. Participants who were supporters of the ruling bloc expressed support for Turkey's strong and respectable stance in international politics, especially under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. By contrast, supporters of opposition parties had a more negative perception of foreign policy, and they shared their opinions on the basis of criticisms against immigrants/asylum-seekers, increasing foreign dependency, and isolation. It has been observed that especially female participants have a more critical attitude on this issue. The opposition voters' criticisms of immigrants/asylum-seekers were also shared by government supporters.

The top solutions proposed for the refugee/immigrant issue, which was identified as the main problem in Turkey's foreign policy, were the normalization of relations with the Syrian government, closing borders to more asylum-seekers/immigrants, and sending the existing ones back. Participants agreed that a solution to isolation and increasing foreign dependency in foreign policy was to increase domestic production in the country. Opposition voters also shared the view that the harsh and aggressive attitude of the government should evolve into a more conciliatory and peaceful direction to solve these problems. They particularly emphasized their belief that Turkey's aggressive stance is only a façade and criticized that it merely paved the way for concessions in the background (e.g. in the Khashoggi case).

Most of the participants expressed their support for cross-border operations of the Turkish Armed Forces, especially where they concerned threats to border security. Only sending soldiers to combat threats in the

immediate environment, carrying out operations with UAVs instead of sending soldiers whenever possible, and avoiding military operations in distant locations, such as Afghanistan, came to the fore in the participant discussions. Another noteworthy point in this regard is that female opposition voters remained more distant towards cross-border operations than other participants, due to soldiers who were martyred.

In terms of perception of friends and enemies, the view that Turkey has too few friends and too many enemies was dominant in all participant groups. However, it was also stated that current friend and enemy definitions are actually based on interests and can be changed when necessary. Even on the subject of Azerbaijan, which is often mentioned among friendly countries, participants expressed their skeptical view that there can be no friendship without interests.

Turkey's EU and NATO membership, which was another discussion topic, was also supported by most of participants, regardless of their support for ruling or opposition parties. It should be once again emphasized that participants expressed their support due to perceptions that the EU would improve living standards, while NATO would provide a deterrent to conflict. Participants who did not support these memberships stated that they preferred Turkey to be independent.

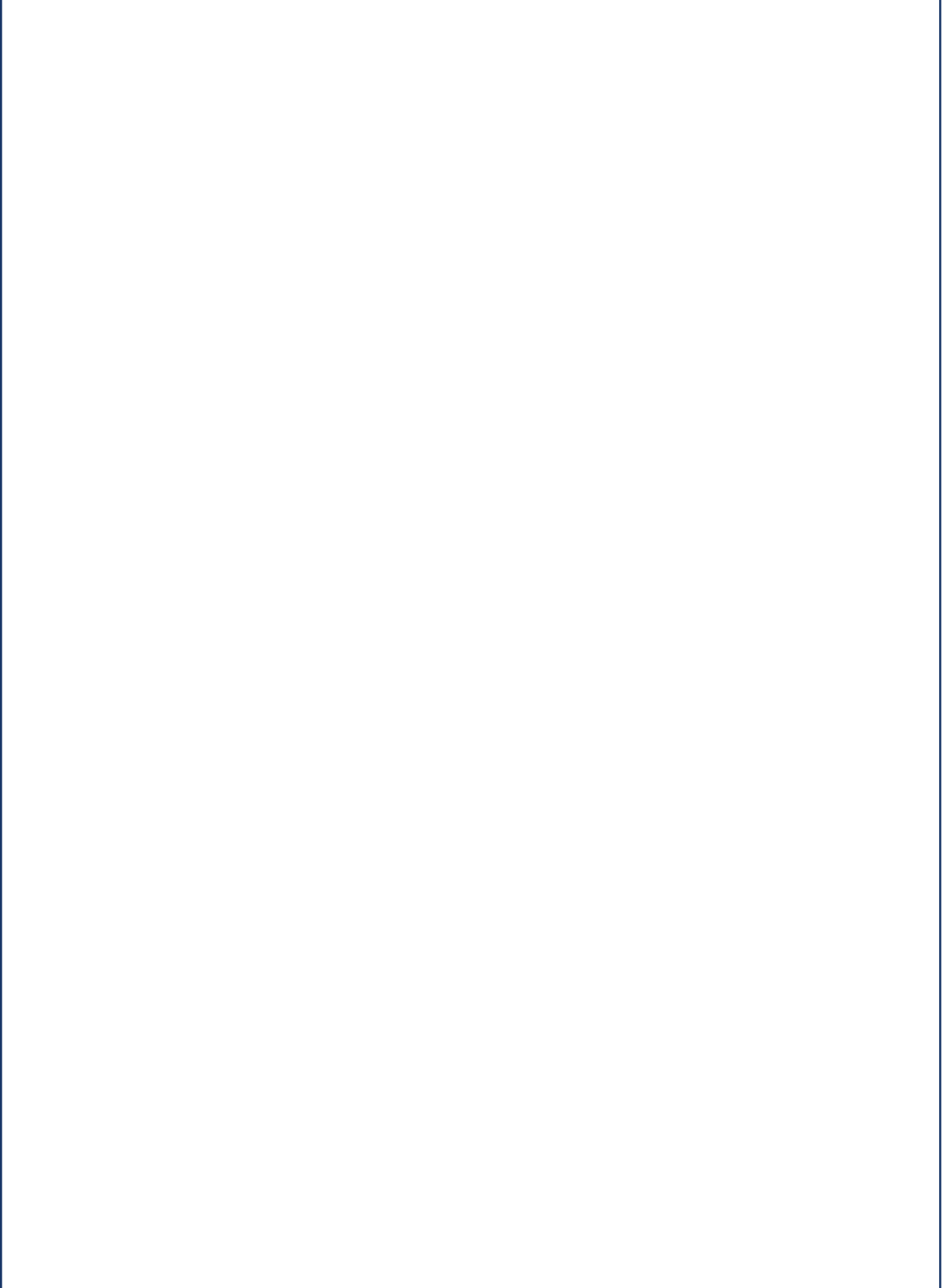
Regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, which came to the fore this year, participants emphasized that Turkey should remain neutral, while most of them underlined the importance of the mediation role played by Turkey as well. However, some opposition voters criticized Turkey's role as a mediator and shared their view that Turkey should not interfere at all.

Similar to last year, misinformation concerning foreign policy and conspiracy theory-like views were expressed, especially among supporters of the ruling bloc. The Russia-Ukraine war and the Treaty of Lausanne were main topics where such views were expressed this year.

NOTES

- 1 Pinar Sayan and Edgar Şar (2021), “Approaches to and Perceptions of Foreign Policy in Turkey”, *IstanPol*. Access Link: <https://istanpol.org/Uploads/ContentManagementFile/2021-012-approaches-to-perceptions-of-foreign-policy-in-turkey.pdf>
- 2 In focus group discussions, the terms “migration”, “immigrant”, “asylum seeker” and “refugee” are generally used to refer to Syrians living under temporary protection status in Turkey. However, with the developments following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, these terms increasingly refer to Afghan immigrants who have become part of the political agenda in Turkey. For this reason, the term ‘immigrants/asylum-seekers’ are used together throughout the report in order not to create conceptual confusion.
- 3 Pursuant to Article 1 of the Presidential Decision No. 5554, made on May 13, 2022 and published in the Official Gazette No. 31834, in subparagraph b of Article 20 of the Regulation on the Implementation of the Turkish Citizenship Law, which regulates the “exceptional acquisition of Turkish Citizenship”, the immovable property requirement, which was previously stated as 250,000 US dollars, has been changed to at least 400,000 US dollars or equivalent in foreign currency.

NOTES



İSTANPOL
İSTANBUL
POLITICAL RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

www.istanpol.org  [istanpolinst](https://twitter.com/istanpolinst)  [istanpolinstitute](https://www.facebook.com/istanpolinstitute)