The Effects of Attitudes Towards Immigrants on Fear of Terrorism in Türkiye

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Abstract

Two prominent subjects in recent years that have captivated the Turkish public are immigration and terrorism. The profound migration crisis in Türkiye, coupled with a surge in terrorism-related crimes, has forged a substantial association between immigrants and terrorism in the perception of many Turkish people. Along these lines, although there are many academic studies of the relationship in Europe between immigrants and the fear of terrorism, the number of academic studies focusing on Türkiye is insufficient. For this reason, in this study, we use the seventh wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) to focus on the statistical relationship between the fear of terrorism and the view of immigrants in Türkiye. As shown by regression analysis, the rise in fear of terrorism in Türkiye also increases negative attitudes towards immigrants. However, since the results based only on the quantitative regression analysis do not provide in-depth information, we support the quantitative results with face-to-face interviews. In line with the results of the regression analysis, in the interviews, we find that one of the critical factors that increased participants' fear of terrorism is the immigrants who came to Türkiye in recent years.

Keywords: Immigrants, fear of terrorism, terrorism, Ordinal Logistic Regression, Türkiye

1. Introduction

With the large number of immigrants and refugees who flocked to Europe with the Syrian civil war, many Europeans view these newcomers negatively (Demirkol, 2022; Schmuck and Matthes, 2015). During this period, more than half of Europeans identified newly arrived refugees and immigrants as one of the most critical problems for their individual countries and for Europe in general (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; De Coninck *et al.*, 2018; Çilingir, 2020).

As illustrated in Figure 1, one of the reasons most Europeans were worried about these immigrants was security concerns related to terrorism (Jacobs *et al.*, 2017; PRC, 2016: 3). Terrorist attacks in Europe surged between 2014 and 2017, resulting in the amplification of populist and far-right anti-immigrant narratives (Postelnicescu, 2016). As a consequence,

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several European nations felt compelled to enact legislation that imposed restrictions on immigration (Vergani and Tacchi, 2016).

Figure 1. Europeans' opinion on the relationship between refugees and terrorism
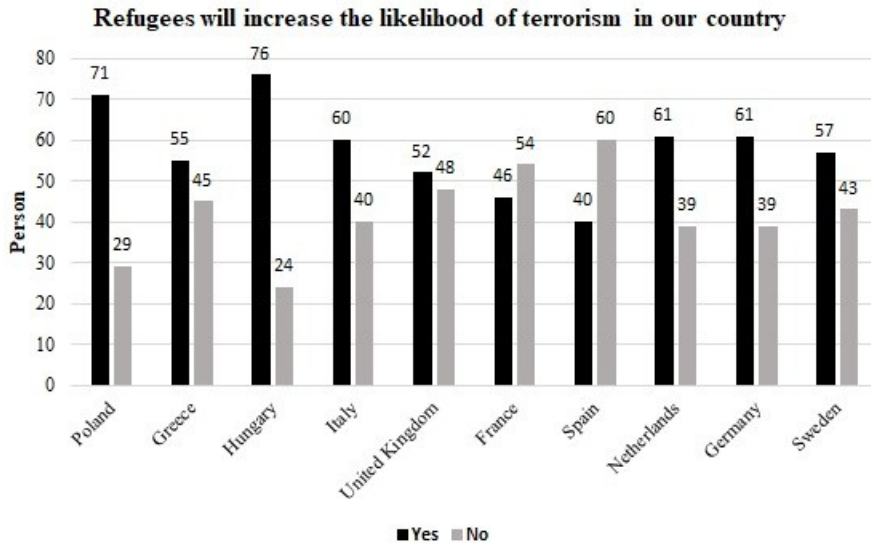
Data Source: PRC (2016: 3).

Given the 13-year Syrian civil war and the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, similar rhetoric and concerns have emerged in Türkiye, a country with a substantial immigrant population (see Figure 2). These immigrants are extensively discussed in the public and political spheres.

**Figure 2.** Number of immigrants in Türkiye since 2015
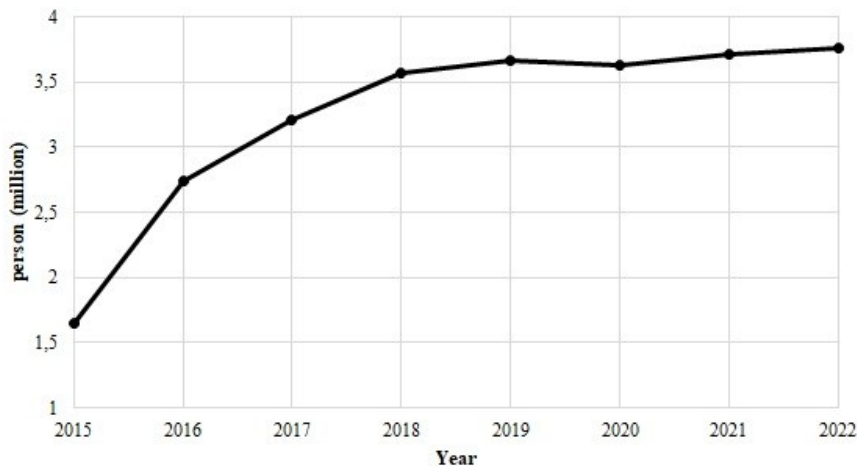

Data Source: IOM (2022).

There are serious concerns in the Turkish public about the economic and social effects of the migration wave on Türkiye, as well as fears that immigrants will cause national security problems related to terrorism. Based on the results of the seventh wave of the World Values Survey (Haerpfer *et al.*, 2022), as illustrated in Figure 3, 67.7% of Turkish respondents either support restricting immigration or advocate for a complete ban on immigrants entering the country. Similarly, in an October 2017 survey in Türkiye, 78% of the participants stated that immigrants from Syria made Türkiye more dangerous (Topal *et al.*, 2017; ICG, 2018). Likewise, 75% of the Turkish respondents in a December 2017 survey said they could not live peacefully with Syrian refugees (Abdelaaty, 2021; ICG, 2018).

Figure 3. Immigration policy preferences in Türkiye
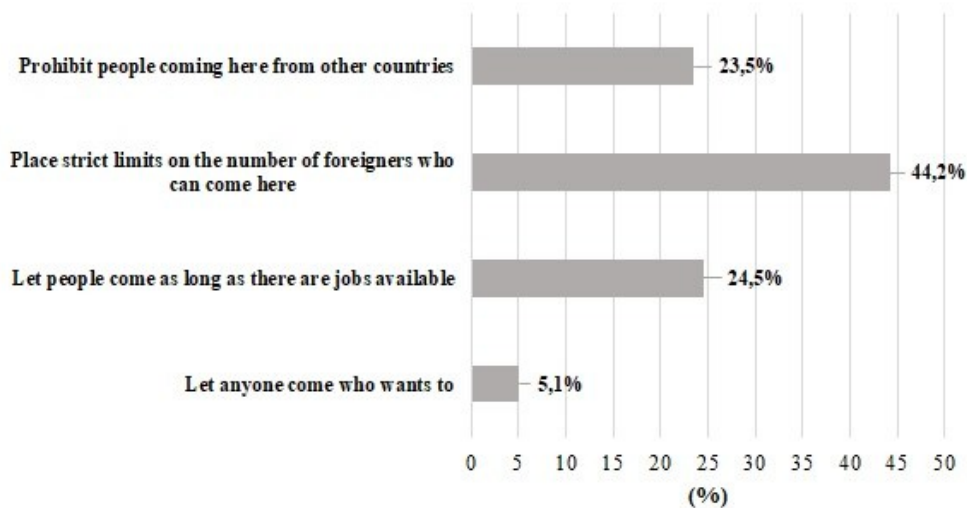
Data Source: Haerpfer *et al.* (2022).

However, while numerous academic studies have examined the relationship between public perceptions of immigrants and the fear of terrorism in Europe and the United States, research in Türkiye regarding the fear of terrorism and attitudes toward immigrants—issues that have sparked significant debates in the Turkish public and political arena in recent years—remains insufficient. Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 4, despite the increasing fear of terrorism in Türkiye in recent years, the potential impact of attitudes toward immigrants on this rising fear has not been thoroughly examined. In this direction, to fill this gap in the literature, this study focuses on the fear of terrorism and views on immigrants in Türkiye. For this purpose, we analyse the relationship between the fear of terrorism and public perception of immigrants in Türkiye using the World Values Survey's seventh wave (Haerpfer *et al.*, 2022) with the Ordinal Logistic Regression (OLR) model. We support the quantitative regression analysis results with 33 face-to-face interviews. We think people's in-depth knowledge and subjective opinions are needed to explain issues related to immigrants and the fear of terrorism.

Figure 4. Worries about possible terrorist attack in Türkiye
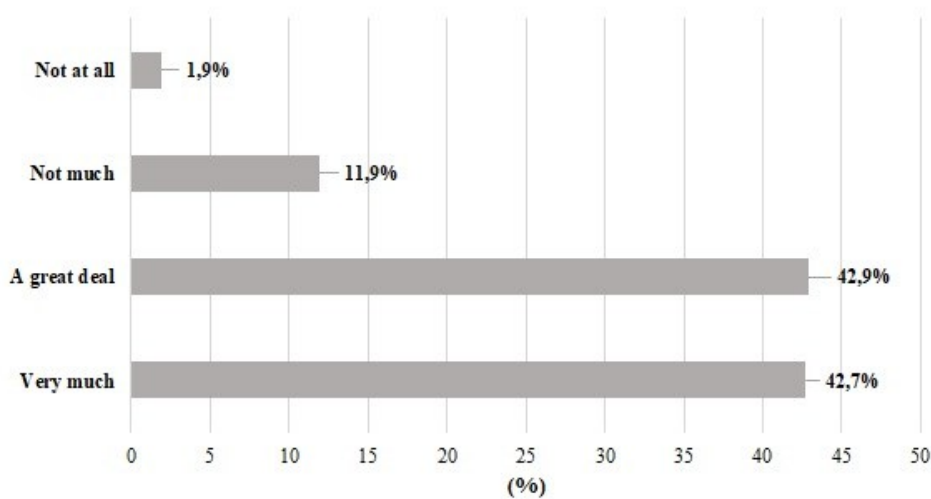
Data Source: Haerpfer *et al.* (2022).

The following section of the study presents a review of the literature concerning the relationship between fear of terrorism and immigration. In the literature review, we aim to draw a comprehensive framework of academic studies that examines the dependent, independent, and control variables selected for analysis. The subsequent section explains this study's quantitative and qualitative research methods employed in this study. Following this, we describe the results of the quantitative analysis and the findings from the qualitative analysis. Finally, the conclusion section summarises the research and its implications.

2. Literature Review

Worry and fear, two of the most powerful human emotions, may appear in several ways (Tulga, 2022). Worry could be a rational response to the existence of actual danger or else an illogical response to an imagined threat. Anxiety can serve a political purpose or a deep psychological need. Also, it could either paralyze or motivate people (Aly and Balnaves, 2007: 113-122).

Many academic studies on fear, which is a strong individual and social emotion, focus on the public's fear of terrorism and its effects on people's psychological and social relations (i.e., Finseraas and Listhaug, 2013; Vitale and Keagle, 2014). Especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, many academic studies have been done on the fear of terrorism in various countries. Misis *et al.* (2017) suggested that following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, worry about terrorism was found to influence many Americans. Their research found that respondents were somewhat afraid of terrorism and moderately certain that another attack could occur soon (Misis *et al.*, 2017). They contend, however, that public fear of terrorism in the United States has varied over time, occasionally growing in response to specific terrorist incidents (Misis *et al.*, 2017). The active threat of homegrown radical terrorism and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in 2015 caused another spike in worry about terrorism in the United States. Nearly half of all Americans feared being

a terrorist victim in 2015 (Misis *et al.*, 2017; Lavanco *et al.*, 2008; Tulga, 2022). However, these studies focused on the United States.

Türkiye presents sharp differences from the United States due to its location on the edge of the Middle East and proximity to ISIS and other terrorist groups. Sipahi (2016) did a study on Türkiye and the Turkish public's fear of terrorism. The author found that the rate of those in Türkiye who feared a terrorist attack was 78% (Sipahi, 2016).

Immigration, one of the key issues in the globalizing world, has also affected studies focusing on the fear of terrorism. Thus, studies focusing on the fear of terrorism and the migration wave that includes Europe began in recent years to focus on the relationship between the fear of terrorism and the perception of immigrants. People's innate tendency to avoid and fear the unfamiliar has permeated various aspects of contemporary society (Greenberg *et al.*, 1990; Lieberman, 2004). Immigration often serves as a catalyst for this unease, as it tends to promote interactions among diverse groups with distinct ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Cruz *et al.*, 2020). The arrival of new immigrants to various countries in Europe and the world causes fears, including general security concerns, among those countries' local people (Mayda, 2006; Pereira *et al.*, 2010). The escalation of terrorist incidents is often a traumatizing yet compelling force, leading to countries passing restrictive immigration laws (Collingwood *et al.*, 2018; Cruz *et al.*, 2020) as well as the formation of anti-immigrant political movements (Vergani and Tacchi, 2016; Cruz *et al.*, 2020).

At a time when immigrants are coming into Europe in large numbers, many people are hostile to these newcomers. While most Europeans view immigration as the continent's top challenge (Nowrasteh *et al.*, 2020), a sizable portion of Europeans believes that these immigrants pose a threat to their country's security (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; De Coninck *et al.*, 2018; Jacobs *et al.*, 2017; PRC, 2016) and they argue that incoming immigrants will cause terrorism in their country (Forrester *et al.*, 2019; PRC, 2016). Moreover, immigrants who came to Europe have featured prominently in the anti-immigrant rhetoric of right-wing parties across Europe (PRC, 2016; Pedersen *et al.*, 2007). Terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, which coincided with massive immigration waves, also fuelled public fears about terrorism (PRC, 2016). As a 2016 Pew Research Center survey (PRC) revealed, the refugee crisis and the threat of terrorism are interlinked in the minds of many Europeans, who think that rising refugee numbers will lead to more terrorist attacks (PRC, 2016). In eight out of ten European countries, most respondents said they believe incoming refugees increase the likelihood of terrorism and terrorist attacks in their country (PRC, 2016).

Forrester *et al.* (2019) examined the impact of the immigrant population on terrorism in European countries. In their analysis, contrary to public fears, the authors found no empirical evidence to suggest that an increase in the immigrant population is significantly associated with higher terror rates in Europe (Forrester *et al*, 2019). Similarly, Gassebner *et al.* (2017) investigated whether immigration from specific countries increased terrorist attacks between 1980 and 2010. The authors' analysis found no evidence to suggest that immigration from Muslim countries of origin poses a higher risk of terrorism in destination countries (Gassebner *et al.*, 2017).

Several studies have examined the impact of terrorist attacks on public attitudes toward immigrants. For instance, Turkoglu and Chadefaux (2023) found that terrorist attacks had no significant effect on participants' attitudes toward immigrants in their study covering 30

European countries. Similarly, Castanho Silva (2018) and Finseraas and Listhaug (2013) concluded that terrorist attacks in Europe did not fundamentally alter social attitudes toward immigrants. On the other hand, Kantorowicz *et al.* (2023) argued that terrorist attacks heighten the perceived threat posed by immigrants and negatively influence public attitudes toward them.

Apart from these studies, some research focused on more specific countries such as Belgium, Germany, Israel, and the United States and on the relationship between the fear of terrorism and views on immigrants in these countries (i.e., Bar-Tal and Labin, 2001; De Coninck, 2020; Lucassen, 2017; Pedersen *et al.*, 2007). De Coninck (2020) investigated how attitudes towards refugees are related to fear of terrorism in Belgium with 1,500 Belgians from 402 municipalities. The author found that positive attitudes toward refugees were associated with a lower fear of terrorism (De Coninck, 2020). On the other hand, De Coninck (2020) stated that a negative attitude toward refugees is associated with an increased fear of terrorism. The author found that individuals who interact—either directly or indirectly—with outgroups tend to view migrants more favourably than those who do not engage with them. Additionally, residents of cities with larger immigrant populations are more likely to encounter immigrants and, consequently, develop more positive attitudes toward them (De Coninck, 2020; De Coninck *et al.*, 2018). Conversely, Larsen *et al.* (2020), in their study focused on Germany, concluded that the fear of terrorism does not significantly influence attitudes toward immigrants and refugees.

In the cases of Israel and the United States, it has been concluded that Arab immigrants cause more fear of terrorism than other immigrants. Bar-Tal and Labin (2001), after a spike in conflicts between Israel and Palestine, observed an increase in Israeli adolescents' anti-Arab prejudice and increased social distancing from Arab Palestinians (see also Pedersen *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, Oswald *et al.* (2005) examined the perception of the threat of terrorist attacks on attitudes towards Arabs in the United States. The authors found that prejudice against Arabs was significantly associated with a perceived threat related to terrorism (Oswald *et al.*, 2005).

Relevantly, some scholars focus on the relationship between nationalism and fear of terrorism (i.e., Leite *et al.*, 2019). Haner *et al.* (2019) found that more nationalist and conservative individuals in the United States were more afraid of terrorism. Likewise, Sury *et al.* (2016) stated that nationalist and conservative participants feared terrorism and other types of crime more than other participants.

Despite these academic studies in the literature, the number of studies focusing on the case of Türkiye, which has hosted the highest number of immigrants and asylum seekers in recent years, is limited. With the assistance of quantitative and qualitative methods, we will try to fill this gap in the literature.

3. Research Design, Data, and Method

Considering the focus of research and literature, the regression analysis focusing on Türkiye shows the relationship between the fear of terrorism and the view of immigrants in Türkiye. For this, we use the seventh wave of the World Values Survey Wave 7 covering 2017-2022 (Haerpfer, *et al.*, 2022). However, unless the quantitative regression analysis results are supported by peoples' subjective feelings and opinions, there is the risk the results will be

superficial and will not provide in-depth information. Therefore, 33 face-to-face interviews support our quantitative analysis' results to understand individuals' subjective opinions and deeply explain the relationship between the fear of terrorism and people's attitudes towards immigrants in Türkiye.

For this reason, we asked questions about the fear of terrorism and the thought of immigrants in face-to-face interviews. In other words, we asked questions directly related to our research's dependent and independent variables. The face-to-face interviews produced findings that a survey analysis would have difficulty answering. Moreover, the results from survey analysis become more meaningful with face-to-face interviews (see also Halcomb and Hickman, 2015; Tulga, 2022).

Accordingly, in this section, we first explain the variables used in survey analysis and descriptive information about survey variables and methods. In the next section, we discuss the process of face-to-face interviews, explain the interview questions in a general framework, and give basic information about the participants (e.g. age and education).

3.1. Basic Information and Description of the Survey

The seventh wave of the World Values Survey covers the years from 2017 to 2022. The wave includes 2,415 observations and 536 variables. However, since not all 536 variables are suitable for this research, we choose eight variables (worry about terrorism, or WAT; opinion about immigrants, OPI; level of education, EDU; gender, GEN; age, AGE; income level, INC; the importance of religion, IOR; and pride in nationality, PON) related to literature for analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the selected variables is 0.75, which shows that the chosen variables' reliability is sufficient. The unit of analysis of the survey is individuals.

The variable with the highest missing value is income (Q288). The missing value of Q288 is 3.56%, and there are 86 cases with a missing value on Q288. The missing values of other variables range from 0 to 84 (see Table 1). Little's test result of the seventh wave regarding missing values is 0.0034. As a result, Little's test is not statistically significant (p ≥.05), so there is no evidence against MCAR (Missing Completely at Random).

Table 1. Description of survey variables

Variables	Number of Observation	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Min.	Max.	Missing Value
WAT	2398	1,72727273	0,74198157	1	4	17
OPI	2349	2,88505747	0,83036637	1	4	66
EDU	2406	0,17123857	0,37679561	0	1	9
GEN	2415	0,50020704	0,50010351	0	1	0
AGE	2414	38,8318144	12,6741122	18	95	1
INC	2329	0,46586518	0,49894058	0	1	86
IOR	2409	1,52303861	0,72076791	1	4	6
PON	2382	1,58102435	0,94845357	1	5	33

Note: Processed by the authors.

We choose "worry about a terrorist attack (Q147)" variable as the dependent variable. "Perception of Immigration (Q121)" is selected as an independent variable in regression

analysis to show the relationship between public opinion on immigration and the Turkish public's fear of terrorism.

We choose "Importance of Religion (Q6)" and "Pride in Nationality (Q254)" as control variables. In addition to these two variables, demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, and income were also used as control variables.

The demographic distribution of the survey participants is essential in terms of the generalizability of the survey analysis. When we look at the gender distribution, the first of these demographic variables, we see that the gender distribution of the participants is equal. When we look at the age distribution of the participants, we see that 45% of the participants were between the ages of 30 and 49, 29.5% between 18 and 29, and 25.5% aged 50 or over. 11.51% of the participants had a low education level, 24.2% a middle education level, and 17.1% a high education level. Specifically, 34.9% of the participants had completed elementary school, 24.1% high school, and 15.7% had graduated from university. Finally, when we look at the income distribution of the participants, 56% of the participants are middle income, 30.4% high income, and 10.1% low income.

3.2. Interview Design

After examining the World Values Survey, we got results that showed the general framework and the relationship between the variables. However, survey analysis cannot fully explain the paper's focus because survey analysis cannot produce information based on human feelings, opinions, and ideas. In this direction, face-to-face qualitative interviews can give us in-depth knowledge in the final step of our research. Therefore, we deepened this research with face-to-face interviews. We conducted in-depth interviews on whether ordinary Turkish people worry about terrorism and, if so, why. In addition, participants were asked questions to assess their views on immigrants and the impact of immigration on their fear of terrorism. These questions specifically focused on immigrants who arrived in Türkiye during the 2010s from regions such as Africa, Syria, and Afghanistan.

We conducted 33 face-to-face interviews in a semi-structured interview format. A semi-structured interview is an interview in which additional questions are asked besides those on the prepared list of questions, or some questions are not asked (Tulga, 2022). A list is designed with 22 questions, but depending on the course of the interview, we do not ask some questions, or do follow-up questions about some others. These draft questions are sent to the participant the day before the interview. There are 22 questions in 4 primary sections. Fourteen questions are essential, and we ask all the participants these questions. Eight questions are minor. We conducted the interviews in Turkish.

We used the snowball sampling method to find interview participants. Snowball sampling, also known as "chain referral" or "networking" sampling (Tulga, 2022), occurs when a researcher gathers data from one individual or a small group and subsequently requests that they connect the researcher with others, who may include friends, family, or other relevant contacts (Mathers et al., 1998; Tulga, 2022). Most of the participants were university graduates. Five of the participants continued their undergraduate education. One was a high school graduate but had not gone farther.

All interviews took place online through the Zoom program. The most important reason for choosing this platform is that audio and video recording is easy. Since we did the interviews online, we selected all the participants from people with internet access.

Most studies in the literature focus on Türkiye's two largest and most important cities, namely Ankara and Istanbul (i.e., Çınğı and Suğur, 2020). Cities such as Adana, Konya, and İzmir are also densely populated and occasionally face terrorist attacks. However, academic studies do not consider the fear of terrorism of people living in these cities. For this reason, participants were selected from Türkiye's three largest cities (Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir) but also from relatively small cities such as Eskişehir and Mersin (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Distribution of interview participants by city
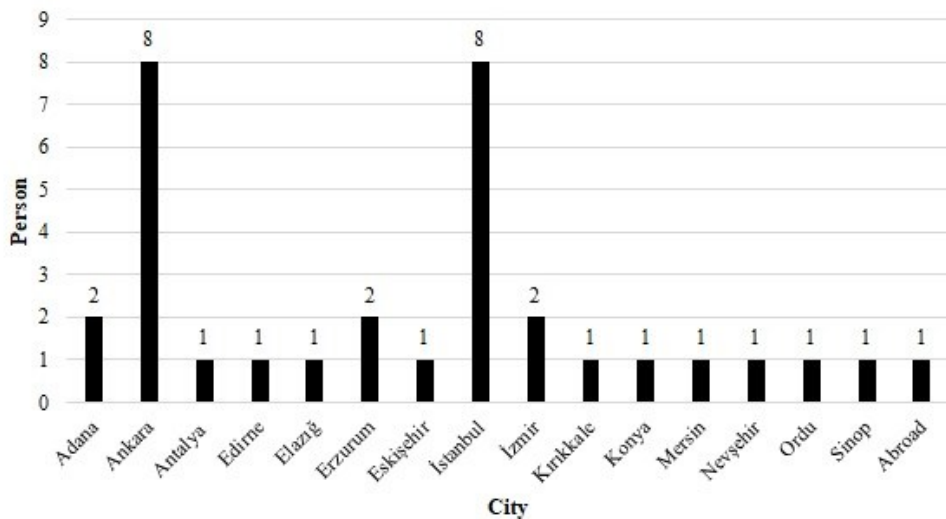
Note: Processed by the authors.

In the interviews, attention was paid to the distribution of men and women, and we interviewed 19 men and 14 women. All interviewees were over the age of 18. As for the age range of interview participants, it was between 18 and 61 years old (Figure 6).

All the interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. In addition to audio recordings, crucial points in the interviews were also written down with the technique of quick note-taking. After the interviews, the audio recordings and interview notes were shared with the participants upon request. Moreover, the recorded interviews were transcribed, and we shared with the participants their interview transcriptions.

The interview results enhance the significance of the regression findings. Additionally, more detailed information could be gathered regarding the general framework that emerged from the regression analysis.

Figure 6. Distribution of interview participants by age
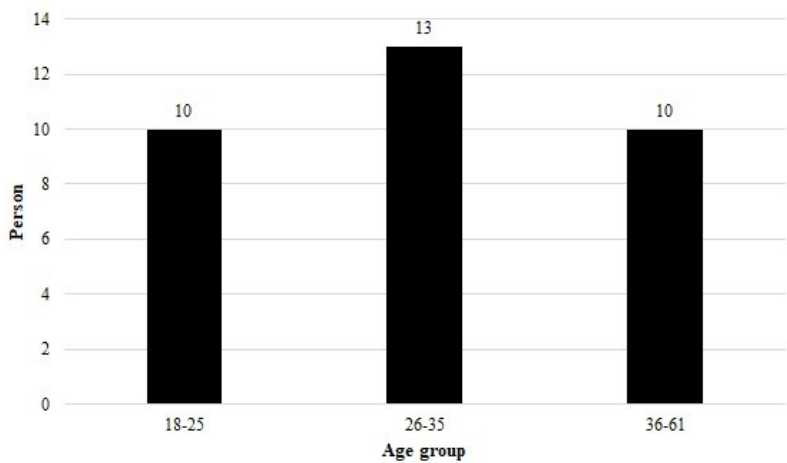
Note: Processed by the authors.

4. Analyses and Findings

From the regression analysis, we obtained significant results supporting this paper's arguments. In this section, firstly we present the results of the regression analysis.

With the regression analysis, we found a strong statistical relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study. We found a highly significant and positive relationship between WAT and OPI: When people's fear of terrorism increases, their attitudes toward immigrants show negative tendencies. Thus, when people's fear of terrorism increases, the possibility of the enactment of negative public policy about immigrants, such as banning or limiting the number of immigrants entering the country immigrants, increases (Table 2).

Important results were also obtained as a result of the relationship between control variables and the fear of terrorism. There is a positive and highly significant relationship between IOR, PON, and the fear of terrorism: as the importance of religion and pride in nationality increases for Turkish participants, there is an increased fear of terrorism. These results are consistent with many studies in the literature. Haner *et al.* (2019) found a positive and significant relationship between the importance of religion, pride in nationality, and fear of terrorism among Americans. Likewise, Leite *et al.* (2019) found that participants who were more religious individuals were also more worried about terrorism.

When we look at the relationship between demographic variables and the participants' fear of terrorism, there is a negative and highly significant relationship between gender (GEN) and fear of terrorism (WAT) in Türkiye, as numerous studies in the literature found. In other words, the regression found that women are more afraid of terrorism than men.

Secondly, a negative and significant relationship was found between age and WAT. This result is consistent with the results of many studies in the literature. Oksanen *et al.* (2020) find that older people are more afraid of terrorism.

No significant statistical relationship exists between other demographic variables, such as INC, EDU, or WAT. This result is consistent with the research focusing on Türkiye. Çınğı and Suğur (2020) found that the fear of terrorism in Türkiye is not significantly related with the level of education or income level.

Table 2. Ordinal Logistic Regression (OLR) results

	Dependent variable (OLR): Worry about Terrorism (WAT) (Wave 7)
Opinion about Immigrants (OPI)	**0.312***
	(0.045)
Age (AGE)	-0.007**
	(0.003)
Gender (GEN)	**-0.293***
	(0.081)
Level of Education (EDU)	0.053
	(0.111)
Income (INC)	-0.090
	(0.083)
Importance of Religion (IOR)	**0.319***
	(0.057)
Pride in Nationality (PON)	**0.262***
	(0.047)
1| 2	**0.822***
	(0.197)
2| 3	**3.069***
	(0.209)
3| 4	**5.310***
	(0.258)
Observations	2,251
Log Likelihood	-2,283.745

*Statistical significance:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note: Processed by the authors.

Findings of the face-to-face interviews also support the regression analysis results. It would be helpful to state these findings in two steps. In the first, we explain whether the participants are afraid of terrorism, and in the second, we explain the reasons behind this fear and why it arises.

In this direction, first, we explain the findings we obtained from the interviews about the fear of terrorism, which is the dependent variable (WAT) of the regression analysis. Most of the

interview participants said they were afraid of terrorism or felt negative emotions related to terrorism (Figure 7). Participant 4's statement can be given as an example in this context.

Figure 7. Level of participants' fear of terrorism
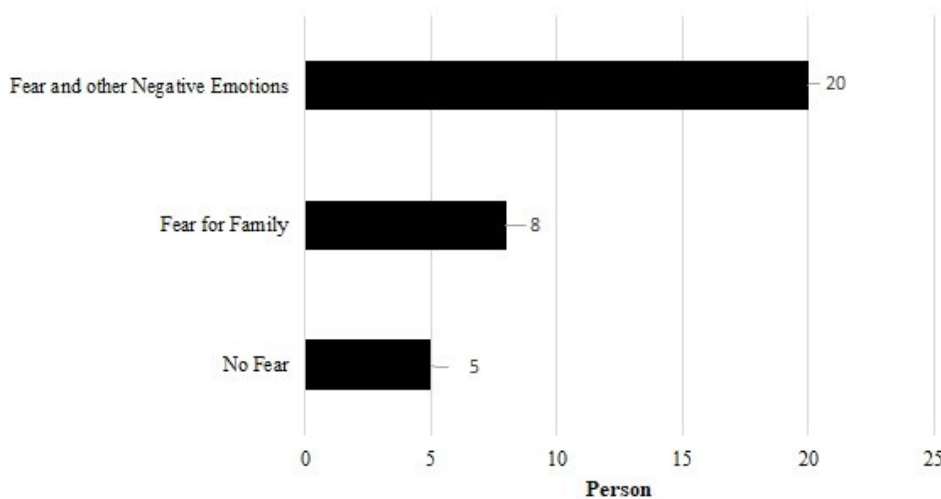
Note: Processed by the authors.

> *"I am terrified of terrorism, and I can say that it has caused significant trauma for myself and my family (...) My family and I were scared, especially after the July 15 [2016] attack, and we could not escape this fear for a long time (…) We were also afraid during the intense terrorist attacks that occurred before July 15. I can state that this fear still continues in my family. Due to this fear, we stayed away from crowded places, even moved from our house in the city centre, and settled outside the city" (Participant 4, female, age 28, Ankara).*

On the other hand, participant 8 (female, 25 years old) said her fear of terrorism is periodic.

> *"I would say that my fear of terrorism is periodic rather than constant (...) I think social media has a significant impact on my periodic fear. The terrorism-related social media posts I saw during [times of] intense terrorist attacks increased my fear of terrorism. However, I have not seen such posts on social media recently because we face many [other] problems such as the economy and the pandemic, so the fear of terrorism remains in the background" (participant 8, female, age 25, Istanbul).*

Some participants expressed concern about the potential physical impact of terrorist attacks on their family members, acquaintances, and friends. The statement of participant 15 can be given as an example.

> *"I feel fear and uneasiness depending on which country the terrorist attacks occurred in. My anxiety increases when I know someone in the country where the attack occurred. However, terrorist attacks in countries I do not know do not affect me (...) After terrorist attacks in Türkiye, I feel fear, anxiety, and anger. The most important emotion that emerged after the attacks in Türkiye was the fear of being a victim of terrorism" (participant 15, male, age 31, Konya).*
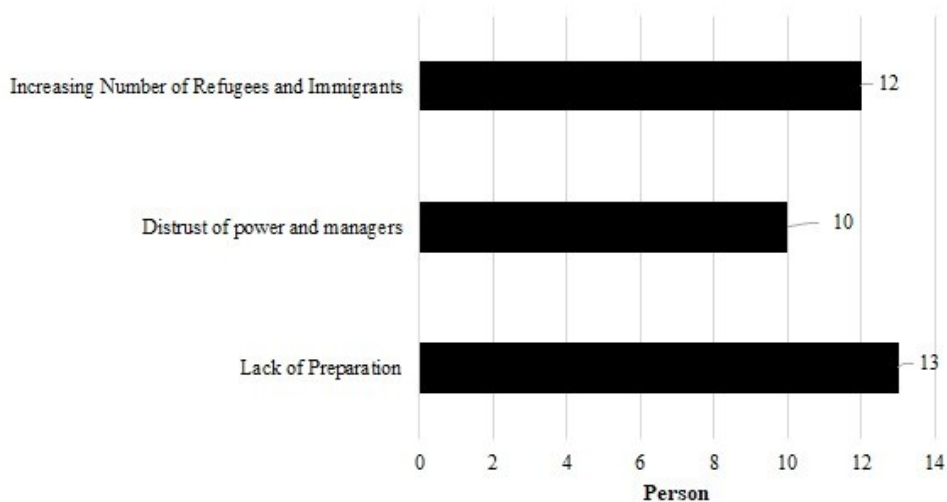
Some participants stated that they were not afraid of terrorism. What participant 32 said is one of the best examples of this group.

"I am not afraid or worried about terrorism. Terrorist attacks certainly do not restrict my work, daily life, or travel plans (...) Terrorism has no personal impact on my daily life (...) Even the fact that a terrorist attack took place near me does not affect my feelings" (participant 32, female, age 59, Adana).

The second stage of the interview findings focused on the factors that had an impact on the participants' fears of terrorism. The participants' answers can be divided into three main groups: the increasing numbers of refugees and immigrants, the distrust of the current government and administrators, and the state's lack of preparation for terrorist attacks (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Reasons behind participants' fear of terrorism

Note: Processed by the authors.

A significant portion of the participants thought that the state and its institutions were not ready for terrorist attacks and said they were afraid of terrorism due to this perceived unpreparedness. What participant 12 said can be given as an example of this group.

"I think that Türkiye and most countries are not ready for any terrorist attack (...) I believe that Türkiye is prepared in terms of intelligence and public security, but there is a possibility of a terrorist attack in general (...) However, I can say that I am more comfortable with terrorism now compared to the period when there were [more] terrorist attacks" (participant 12, male, age 29, Nevşehir).

Some participants, on the other hand, said they did not trust the current government or administrators. Therefore, they were afraid of terrorism. Participant 24's statement could be shown as an example of this group.

"Since the media is under the control of the government, the current interpretation of terrorism is used by the media depending on how the government interprets terrorism, and people accept this interpretation (...) Therefore, our perception of terrorism currently reflects the government's perspective on terrorism (…) Terrorist attacks in Türkiye are used by the government for political purposes. And that's why I think there might be a terrorist attack as we approach the general elections in

> *Türkiye (...) For this reason, I am afraid of terrorism for my family" (participant 24, male, age 24, Antalya).*

Participants in the last group stated that immigrants, the independent variable of this survey analysis, increase their fear of terrorism. What participant 29 said can be given as an example of this group.

> *"I don't think ISIS or any other radical terrorist organization will attack Türkiye before 2023. Because right now, terrorists from such radical organizations are settling in Türkiye, and their numbers are increasing with each incoming wave of immigrants (...) I see posts on Twitter that immigrants threaten the Turkish people almost every week, and these posts make me very uncomfortable. When I see these social media posts, I feel anger, hatred, and helplessness, and I fear for my family members" (participant 29, male, age 61, Elazığ).*

Participant 5 said the social media posts about immigrants he saw affected his thoughts about immigrants and that these posts increased his fear of terrorism.

> *"I think the probability of a terrorist attack is always high due to Türkiye's geographical location. For this reason, I think Türkiye may have a future terrorist attack. I guess the possibility of terrorist attacks in Türkiye has increased, especially with the entry of Afghan and Syrian refugees into the country (...) The photos of these immigrants and refugees I see on Twitter and other social media platforms are the fundamental reason I am afraid (...) The shoes and clothes of some of these people are similar to the clothes of the Taliban and ISIS terrorists, and I think that among the immigrants, there are sympathizers and even members of these organizations (...) Especially when I see the atrocities committed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq, these people could do the same in Türkiye. I'm pretty scared about that. Sometimes this fear directly affects my approach to immigrants" (participant 5, male, age 26, Erzurum).*

Participant 12 said the increasing number of immigrants caused fear of terrorism.

> *"As someone who has lived in Ankara and Istanbul for many years, I can say that I am more afraid of terrorism because I am currently living in Istanbul (...) I think Ankara is a safer city in the context of terrorism. I can say that the reason for this is that Istanbul is more crowded, especially with the Syrian immigrants who have settled in Istanbul in recent years (…) I do not think that all of the immigrants who settled in Istanbul are people fleeing the civil war. I believe that some of these immigrants are ISIS terrorists and will commit the atrocities they did in Syria when the time comes. This situation increases my fear of terrorism" (participant 12, male, age 30, Istanbul).*

As the interview findings reveal, most of the participants fear terrorism. Although immigrants or refugees do not play the most prominent role in participants' fear of terrorism, the increasing population of immigrants and refugees in recent years is one of the factors that increases their fear of terrorism. In addition, social media posts and news about immigrants on the internet are important factors that increase the participants' fear of terrorism due to immigrants.

5. Discussion

From the survey analysis and face-to-face interviews, remarkable results were obtained. While some of these results are consistent with the literature, some differ from previous research.

The most crucial finding in this context comes from the analysis focusing on the relationship between the fear of terrorism in Türkiye and attitudes towards immigrants, which is the main argument of this article. The survey analysis found a positive and highly significant relationship between the fear of terrorism and attitudes towards immigrants in Türkiye. Furthermore, we found that people's increased fears of terrorism led to negative attitudes towards immigrants. This result is consistent with some studies in the literature. Focusing on the number of terrorist attacks rather than fear of terrorism, Schmuck and Matthes (2015) concluded that greater frequency of terrorist attacks causes an increase in countries of anti-immigrant attitudes. Another study with similar findings was done by Andersen and Mayerly (2018). The authors concluded that one of the fundamental reasons for the increase in anti-immigrant speech in society is media reporting after terrorist attacks (Andersen and Mayerly, 2018). As a result, individuals who fear terrorism develop anti-immigrant attitudes. Finally, De Coninck (2020) also confirms that negative attitudes toward refugees are associated with a greater fear of terrorism. The findings we reached as a result of regression analysis are consistent with the results of these studies in the literature. On the other hand, the findings of this study contrast with those of Turkoglu and Chadefaux (2023) and Larsen *et al.* (2020), which concluded that terrorist attacks and the fear of terrorism do not negatively influence or change individuals' attitudes toward immigrants. However, regardless of whether these findings align with or differ from previous studies in the literature, this study offers deeper insights by incorporating face-to-face interviews, a method that has not been commonly employed in prior research.

In the interviews, most participants said that they fear terrorism, and even if they are not afraid of terrorism for themselves, they are worried for their immediate families, loved ones, and other relatives. When asked the reasons for their fear of terrorism, some participants said they are afraid of terrorism because of the immigrants who have come to Türkiye from Afghanistan and Syria in recent years. However, behind the attitudes of the participants towards immigrants is not only fear of terrorism but also social and economic concerns.

The opinions of the participants who expressed negative views towards immigrants stemmed from the possibility that some immigrants who came to Türkiye may be members of extremist organizations rather than from racism. In particular, as stated by participant 2 and participant 23, news stories, pictures, and videos seen on social media play an influential role in the formation of this perception.

Participant 2 said that he uses social media and the internet actively. He mentioned that he entirely depends on social media and the internet to get news and information. He said that the posts he saw about immigrants on social media played an essential role in the increase in his fears of terrorism. He talked about the fact that refugees coming to Türkiye via Afghanistan cause an increase in terror-related fears. He stated that he would not be surprised if these people organized a terrorist attack, as he suspected they had ties to the Taliban or ISIS (Participant 2, male, age 31, Istanbul).

Similarly, participant 23 said that she saw social media news and posts saying that some of the immigrants from Syria were members of ISIS. She said these people being members of ISIS frightens her because she thinks they are not acting rationally and does not think that they will give up on their goals. She said this situation increased her fear of terrorism (participant 23, female, age 26, Ankara).

The statements of participants 2, 23, and others that the posts they see about refugees on social media increase their fear of terrorism are consistent with Andersen and Mayerly's (2018) research.

Regression analysis found a negative and highly significant relationship between gender and fear of terrorism. This result is consistent with the majority of studies in the literature. Oksanen *et al.* (2020) found that women in Norway, France, Spain, Finland, and the United States were more negatively affected by terrorist attacks than men and had a higher fear of terrorism. Similar results were obtained in Türkiye. Wilcox *et al.* (2009) find that women in Türkiye feel more fear of terrorism than men.

Although we did not focus on the relationship between gender and fear of terrorism in the interviews, we observed that female participants shared their fear of terrorism more openly. In addition, one of the most remarkable findings of this study is that the participants with children stated that though they were not afraid of terrorism for themselves, they were fearful of terrorism for their children. This finding is consistent with Christensen and Aars' (2017) research. They concluded that Norwegian participants feared for their children and worried about their children's future after terrorist attacks based on their field study after the July 22, 2011 terrorist attack in Norway (Christensen and Aars, 2017).

Another finding is a negative and statistical relationship between age and fear of terrorism. In other words, as people get older, their fear of terrorism increases. These findings are inconsistent with studies focusing on Türkiye. Çınğı and Suğur (2020) found that age in Türkiye is not statistically significant in relation to the fear of terrorism.

There is no statistical relationship between fear of terrorism and other demographic variables, such as education and income. Finally, there is a positive and highly significant relationship between the control variables, the importance of nationalism and religion, and the fear of terrorism.

6. Conclusion

With the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan, and the Ukraine war in recent years, millions of immigrants left their countries. They migrated to various countries of the world. As a result of this migration flow, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have become one of the most discussed issues in the public and political arenas of many countries. As a result, the negative attitudes of some of the local people toward the incoming immigrants caused some political parties to develop negative rhetoric and make anti-immigrant discourse a part of their political agenda. In particular, the anti-immigrant rhetoric that far-right and populist parties use in their discourses caused these parties to gain more popularity among the public.

In recent years, similar discussions have emerged in Türkiye, which hosts one of the largest populations of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the world, largely due to its proximity to conflict zones such as Syria. The immigration problem is a major issue of almost all political parties, and they try to formulate policies on immigrants, especially in terms of economic, social, and security issues. Some members of the public are concerned about immigrants for security reasons, such as terrorism, and argue that immigrants will increase terrorism or other types of crime in Türkiye.

Despite all these discussions in Türkiye, studies focusing on the case of Türkiye are limited in the literature. Although the number of academic studies focusing on European countries on immigrants and the fear of terrorism increases yearly, academic studies written in countries with a large immigrant population, such as Türkiye, are insufficient. For this reason, this study focused on the fear of terrorism in Türkiye and examines how this fear influences attitudes toward immigrants. The aim was to address this gap in the existing literature to some extent.

This study first analysed the seventh wave of the World Values Survey with the quantitative method to show the direction of the relationship between fear of terrorism and attitudes toward immigrants. Based on the survey results, we found a positive and highly significant relationship between fear of terrorism and attitudes towards immigrants in Türkiye; it was found that the increase in people's fear of terrorism has a negative impact on their attitudes towards immigrants.

However, the findings from the quantitative analysis remained superficial, and failed to reach an in-depth interpretation. For this reason, the study was deepened with qualitative face-to-face interviews to provide in-depth information about the fear of terrorism and attitudes towards immigrants.

In the face-to-face interviews, we found that most participants feared terrorism. We found three main reasons for this: the increase in the number of immigrants, Türkiye's perceived unpreparedness for a terrorist attack, and distrust in the current government or institutions. The news reports and posts they saw on social media effectively changed the attitudes of some participants, who said that their fear of terrorism increased due to the increase in the number of immigrants. We found these findings in the case of Türkiye were consistent with many studies in the general academic literature as well.

Despite the critical findings of the study, it has some limitations. The primary limitation is the reliance on a single wave in the survey analysis, which prevents periodic comparisons and the identification of temporal changes. Additionally, all interview participants were selected from individuals who regularly use social media and the internet, suggesting that their perspectives may have been influenced by frequent exposure to anti-immigrant news and online discourse. Including participants who rarely or never use social media could provide a more diverse range of viewpoints. Future research that addresses these limitations—such as longitudinal studies incorporating multiple survey waves and qualitative analyses with a broader participant pool— would enhance the understanding of public attitudes toward immigration in Türkiye. Furthermore, studies utilising text analysis to examine social media discourse on immigration would offer valuable insights into digital narratives and their impact on public opinion.

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