

**ATTITUDES TOWARD
SYRIAN REFUGEES
IN ISTANBUL:
PARTISANSHIP, XENOPHOBIA, THREAT
PERCEPTIONS, AND SOCIAL CONTACT**

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1

INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, Syria has become the world's largest source of emigration.¹ In the past 10 years, 6.1 million Syrians were internally displaced² and another 6.6 million had to leave their country.³ Migration from Syria to its territorial neighbor Turkey started in April 2011 and grew to a mass movement especially after mid-2012. As can be seen in Figure 1.1, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey reached 2.5 million by the end of 2015 and exceeded 3.5 million by the end of 2017. This made Turkey home to the largest refugee population in the world.⁴

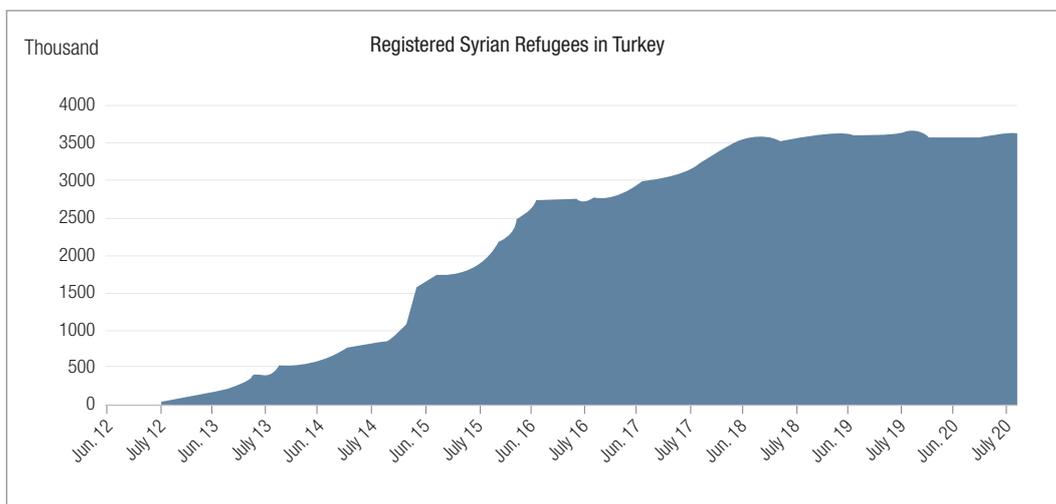


Figure 1.1 Number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, 2012-2020⁵

Over time, the number of Syrian refugees living in “temporary accommodation centers” has decreased and the refugee population has spread from border towns to metropolitan centers across Turkey. According to the latest data by the Directorate General of Migration Management (*Göç İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü*, GİGM), more than 98 percent of Syrian refugees live in cities.⁶ Therefore, Syrians living in Turkey have become “urban refugees.”⁷

During this period, Istanbul has become the primary destination of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Records from the GiGM show that roughly 520,000 temporary protection beneficiaries are registered in Istanbul.⁸ However, it is known that many more Syrian refugees live in Istanbul despite being registered in other cities. A recent study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates nearly one million Syrians to be residing in Istanbul (see Figure 1.4). This would mean that Syrian refugees amount to more than 6.3 percent of Istanbul’s local population.

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Since 2016, Turkey has largely abandoned its “open door” policy toward Syrian refugees and implemented policies aimed at preventing migratory flows to large cities such as Istanbul.⁹ Reflecting these more recent policy reversals, the treatment of immigrants became harsher in 2019, when unregistered refugees and those who were registered in other cities were forcefully evicted from Istanbul.¹⁰ In the early months of 2021, the authorities decided to not issue new residence permits for foreigners in the Fatih and Esenyurt districts of Istanbul, where immigrants are densely populated.¹¹

The distribution of Syrian refugees in Turkey differs not only by province but also by district. As shown in Table 1.1, Figure 1.2, and Figure 1.3, the Syrian refugees in Istanbul predominantly reside in the peripheries of the city, in neighborhoods that largely consist of lower-class residents—with the exception of Başakşehir, Beyoğlu, and Fatih. In these lower-class neighborhoods on the city’s periphery, relations between the immigrant and local populations can become extremely tense and lead to occasional lynching attempts.¹²

Table 1. Number of Syrians by District and the Percentage of Syrians in the District Population¹³

District	District Population	Number of Syrians	Percent of Population	Rank by Number	Rank by Percentage
Adalar	16,119	145	0.90	39	30
Arnavutköy	270,549	44,244	16.35	8	3
Ataşehir	416,318	3,377	0.81	29	31
Avcılar	435,625	30,021	6.89	13	15
Bağcılar	734,369	79,305	10.80	3	8
Bahçelievler	594,053	29,899	5.03	14	18
Bakırköy	220,668	790	0.36	35	37
Başakşehir	427,835	66,234	15.48	4	4
Bayrampaşa	271,073	19,020	7.02	19	14
Beşiktaş	181,074	637	0.35	36	38
Beykoz	246,700	4,416	1.79	26	26
Beylikdüzü	331,525	8,302	2.50	22	21
Beyoğlu	230,526	39,298	17.05	9	2
Büyükdere	247,736	5,005	2.02	24	24
Çatalca	72,966	419	0.57	38	35
Çekmeköy	251,937	3,067	1.22	30	28
Esenler	444,561	58,342	13.12	6	6
Esenyurt	891,120	127,210	14.28	1	5
Eyüpsultan	383,909	20,736	5.40	17	17
Fatih	436,539	80,920	18.54	2	1
Gaziosmanpaşa	487,046	37,362	7.67	10	12
Güngören	289,331	20,788	7.18	16	13
Kadıköy	458,638	1,324	0.29	34	39
Kağıthane	437,026	36,640	8.38	11	11
Kartal	461,155	2,457	0.53	33	36
Küçükçekmece	770,317	49,479	6.42	7	16
Maltepe	497,034	3,065	0.62	31	34
Pendik	693,599	11,334	1.63	21	27
Sancaktepe	414,143	16,445	3.97	20	19
Sarıyer	342,503	2,771	0.81	32	32
Silivri	187,621	3,873	2.06	28	23
Sultanbeyli	327,798	30,200	9.21	12	9
Sultangazi	523,765	63,331	12.09	5	7
Şile	36,516	444	1.22	37	29
Şişli	274,289	5,705	2.08	23	22
Tuzla	255,468	4,816	1.89	25	25
Ümraniye	690,193	19,211	2.78	18	20
Üsküdar	529,145	4,008	0.76	27	33
Zeytinburnu	284,935	24,503	8.60	15	10

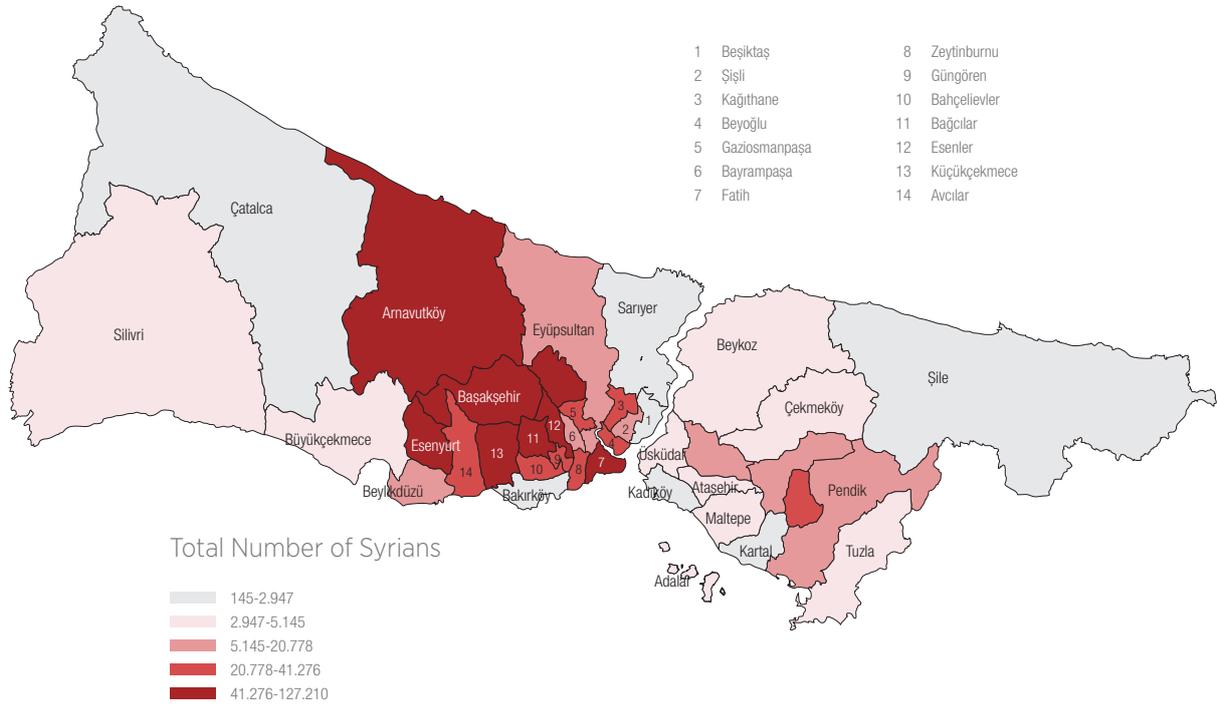


Figure 1.2 Number of Syrian Refugees by District¹⁴

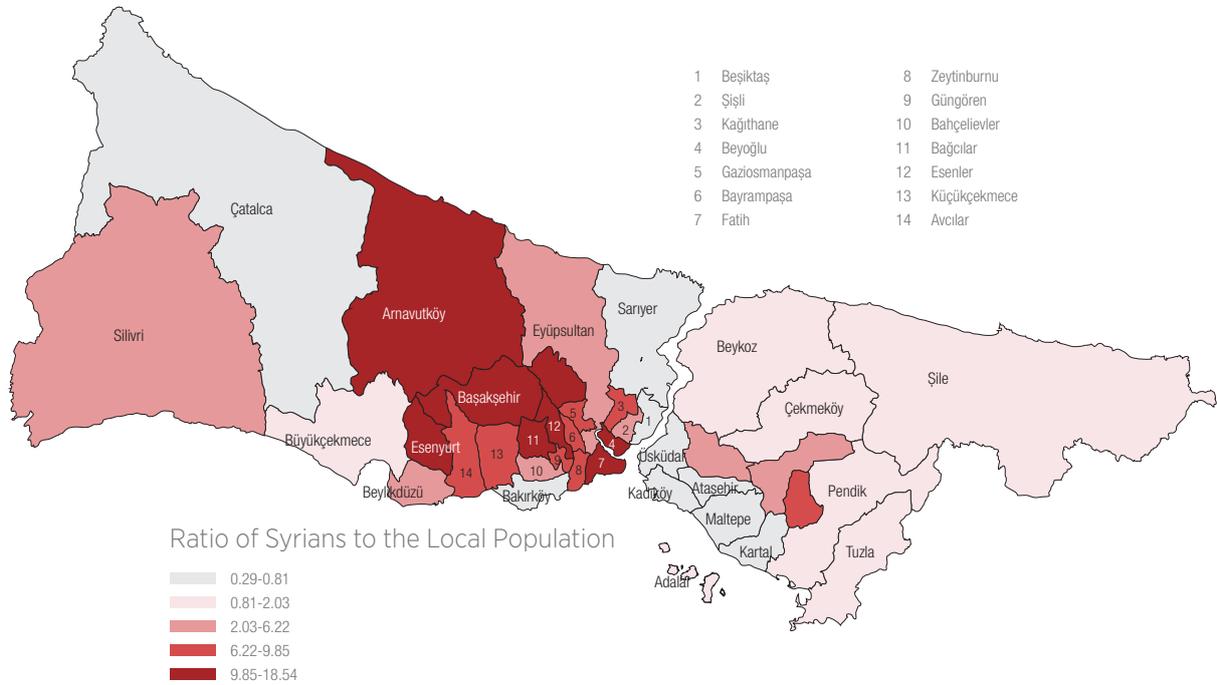


Figure 1.3 Percentage of Syrian Refugees in District Population (%)¹⁵

Public opinion studies on the subject show that perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey have significantly worsened in recent years and that the majority of citizens are in favor of deporting refugees to their country of origin.¹⁶ Given these findings, it has been suggested that while Turkish society is deeply polarized in almost every issue, it is united in opposing Syrian refugees. The present study addresses this question in the context of Istanbul. In terms of both population and economic size, Istanbul is Turkey’s most important city. Moreover, Istanbul is significantly more heterogeneous than other cities in terms of social class, ethnic identity, lifestyle, and political attitudes. Therefore, although the findings of a study on Istanbul do not allow for statistical inferences about Turkey more generally, they do allow for broader theoretical extrapolations. More importantly, Istanbul hosts a large foreign population. As can be seen in Figure 1.4, “The City of Seven Hills,” is home to not only Syrian refugees but also many other international migrants from diverse national origins. In a metropolis that claims to be a global city and stands at the intersection of several different migratory currents, examining the relations between natives and immigrants is critical not only academically but also politically and socially.

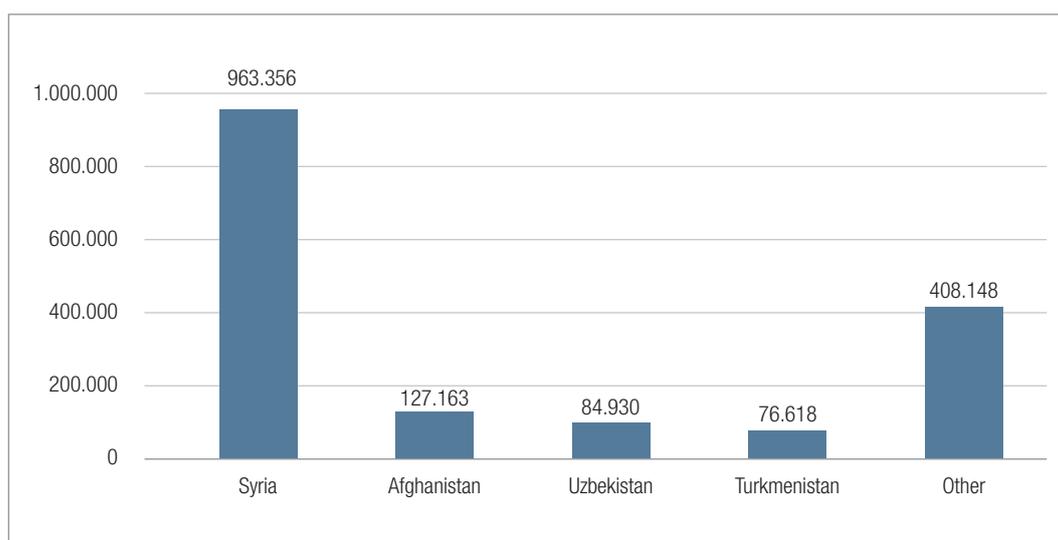


Figure 1.4 International migrants in Istanbul and their states of origin¹⁷

This report aims to reveal Turkish citizens’ perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Istanbul and identify the political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors underlying them. In light of the existing academic studies on attitudes toward immigrants, our study focuses particularly on the role of identity-based threat perceptions and material concerns. Using variables such as political preference, ethnic identity, religious belonging, lifestyle, social class, and gender, we analyze how Turkish citizens from different political and social backgrounds view Syrian refugees. We also examine how citizens interpret and negotiate the prevailing discourses on refugees articulated by political actors and civil society organizations. In doing so, we hope to shed light on the multi-dimensional nature of natives’ attitudes toward Syrians and contribute to the development of discourses and policies that would facilitate the social integration of refugees.

This study uses a mixed-methods design, in which the qualitative stage of research informs and shapes the quantitative stage. In the qualitative stage, we conducted 16 focus group discussions

with women and men from different social segments in Istanbul. In addition, we conducted in-depth interviews with 32 individuals selected from these focus groups. In the quantitative stage, we conducted a survey with 2,284 respondents representing Turkish citizens aged 18 and over living in Istanbul. In preparing the survey questions, we made use of not only academic studies on attitudes toward immigrants, but also the findings from the qualitative stage of our research. This helped us avoid a top-down approach that risks merely repeating the existing academic literature. The field-work for the survey was carried out between 18 July 2020 and 30 August 2020. The interviews were conducted through computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

The details about our research methodology are discussed in Part 2, and research findings are presented in Part 3, 4, and 5. Part 3 aims to provide a general outline of Turkish citizens' perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Istanbul. As shown in that section, adult Turkish citizens living in Istanbul have a significant degree of cultural, social, and emotional distance from Syrians. Despite religious and historical commonalities, the majority of Istanbul residents culturally marginalize Syrians and avoid building social relations with them. Moreover, there are widespread concerns that Syrians are reducing employment opportunities for the local populace, disrupting the population balance through high rates of childbirth, threatening modern lifestyle practices, making it difficult for local people to benefit from public spaces and services, increasing sexual assault rates against women and children, posing a terrorist risk, and influencing election results by voting. In line with these findings, our analyses show that Istanbul residents hold, on average, extremely negative sentiments about foreign migrants in general and Syrian refugees in particular.

Drawing data mainly from the focus groups, Part 3 shows that the exclusionary attitudes toward Syrian refugees have a gender dimension. Hierarchical representations of femininity and masculinity reproduce dominant gender norms and ideals and thereby fuel exclusionary perceptions of Syrians. Many of our focus group participants described Syrian men as unmanly types who have fled to Turkey instead of fighting for their home country; as abusive figures who have fun in public parks and beaches and harass "our women and children" "while our own soldiers are becoming martyrs [in Syria]." Syrian women, on the other hand, were targeted primarily through their fertility and sexuality. Thus, our participants constructed their positions of femininity and masculinity in opposition to the negative representations of femininity and masculinity they attributed to Syrian refugees.

Finally, Part 3 examines citizens' political preferences on several issues concerning Syrians. The findings show that the government's "open door" policy toward Syrian refugees, which was in effect until 2016, receive limited public support, even among the supporters of the government. In contrast, there is a high degree of support for proposals to resettle refugees in "safe zones" inside Syria or in refugee camps in Turkey. Nonetheless, our findings also show that Istanbulites are relatively tolerant of the social services provided to Syrians, even if this tolerance is grounded in self-interested motives. According to our survey data, supporting Syrian refugees to learn

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Turkish, making sure that Syrian children receive adequate education, providing general health screenings and vaccination to refugees, and assisting indigent Syrian families have more supporters than opposers. However, any policy that goes beyond the provision of social services and offers refugees equal status and rights with natives, such as citizenship or work permits, is met with very low levels of approval.

For each variable discussed in Part 3, distribution by party preference is also shown to give an idea of how perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrians are socially differentiated. Our results show that partisan identities are one of the key factors affecting how locals view Syrian refugees. Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AK Parti) and Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) voters are less likely to perceive Syrians as a threat compared to other voter groups. In contrast, on almost every issue, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and Good Party (*İYİ Parti*) voters have above-average levels of perceived threat. Paralleling this divide, AK Parti and HDP partisans have a higher likelihood of supporting policies in favor of refugees.

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Part 4 analyzes factors other than partisanship that shape the local population's views of Syrian refugees. Here, we focus on two of the perceptions and attitudes discussed in Part 3: average feeling toward Syrians and support for conditional citizenship policies. Our analysis indicates that there is no meaningful association between the participants' age, gender, level of education, and monthly household income on the one hand and their feelings about Syrian refugees on the other. That said, college graduates and those with higher incomes show relatively higher support for extending citizenship to Syrians who have no criminal record and have the skills to practice professions that are in demand in Turkey. In other words, individuals with better socio-economic conditions, despite not holding more positive sentiments about Syrians, tend to be relatively open to the idea of extending citizenship to those who satisfy certain criteria.

Our findings point to nationalism and xenophobic tendencies as one of the most important factors in shaping sentiments and attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Participants who self-identify as "Turkish nationalist" rank significantly lower than others in terms of the average feeling they have about Syrians and their rates of support for conditional citizenship. Similarly, participants who are concerned that the ratio of Turks in the population is declining have much colder feelings about Syrians and show very limited support for conditional citizenship. Moreover, there is a strong correlation between views about foreign migrants in general and views about Syrian refugees in particular. Prejudices targeting the Arabs in general also have an effect on exclusionary attitudes toward Syrian refugees. These findings suggest that exclusionary reactions to Syrians do not only stem from threat perceptions regarding them but also reflect a generalized xenophobia. More moderate feelings about Syrians among the Kurdish and Alevi participants of our study, compared with the Sunni Turkish majority, should be understood in this context. Nonetheless, negative feelings toward Syrians are also prevalent among citizens who are ethnic and religious minorities.

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Our results also show that lifestyle-related social divisions affect how Syrian refugees are perceived. There is a positive relationship between agreeing with the discourse that Syrians are “our brothers-in-religion” on the one hand and feelings and attitudes toward the refugees on the other. This relationship remains strong even when we control for other variables such as demographic characteristics and party preferences. Conservative social segments in general appear to have a less hostile attitude toward Syrian refugees. That said, negative feelings and opinions about Syrian refugees are also widespread among conservatives. Moreover, the greater the anxieties over the country’s economic future, the less effective is shared Muslim identity in improving attitudes toward refugees. This finding can be interpreted as a conflict between the identities and interests of those social groups who are receptive to the religious brotherhood discourse. On the other hand, among secular social segments who tend to reject the religious brotherhood discourse, the perception of Syrian refugees as a threat to secularism and women’s freedoms contributes to exclusionary attitudes.

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Attitudes toward Syrian refugees are not merely related to matters of identity and cultural concerns. Our results indicate that as concerns over the nation’s economic future increase, the perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrians take a negative turn. Personal economic concerns, however, appear to have a weaker relationship with views about Syrian refugees. It can thus be claimed that the anxieties over general economic conditions play a more significant role than personal economic anxieties in shaping attitudes toward Syrians. To put it differently, natives’ negative reactions against Syrian refugees are fueled less by personal self-interest than by the perception that an “outgroup” is exploiting “our” economic resources.

A similar pattern also applies to threat perceptions concerning security. Participants who are highly concerned about a general increase in larceny, homicide, and rape in the near future tend to have a more negative view of Syrian refugees than others. Likewise, the greater the anxieties about possible large-scale terrorist attacks in Turkey, the more exclusionary the attitudes tend to be toward Syrian refugees. Here as well, considerations about personal safety have less of an impact on feelings and attitudes toward Syrians. Just as for economic concerns, the dominant factor is perceived group interests rather than personal well-being.

Part 4 ends with a discussion on the impact of social contact on feelings and attitudes toward Syrians. Istanbul residents regularly come into contact with Syrian refugees in their everyday lives. Beyond these fleeting encounters, however, the ratio of those who establish close and regular relations with a Syrian refugee is extremely low. We find no evidence suggesting that everyday encounters have a positive impact on attitudes toward Syrian refugees. On the contrary, participants who report frequently encountering Syrians in their workplaces tend to be more exclusionary toward refugees. By contrast, participants who have established close and regular relations with a Syrian refugee express much more positive attitudes toward them.

In Part 5 of our study, we discuss the results of a survey experiment on the “Ideal Syrian Refugee.” As part of the experiment, we created 72 distinct Syrian refugee profiles using gender, age group, marital status, professional background, and fluency in Turkish as variables. We then randomly assigned six profiles to each participant and asked them whether they would approve granting residence permits to the individuals depicted in the profiles. Our analyses show that the participants’ general attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethnic diversity influenced their profile assessments much more strongly than did the personal characteristics of the profiles. Nonetheless, several personal traits did have a meaningful impact on the profile assessments. Especially in evaluating young refugees, the occupational background of the profile was significant: Refugees with professional skills were preferred over unskilled workers. In addition, participants with strong nationalist sentiments tended to have a more positive attitude toward refugees fluent in Turkish.

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Our analyses show that the participants’ general attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethnic diversity influenced their profile assessments much more strongly than did the personal characteristics of the profiles.

In summary, our research reveals that negative perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees cannot be reduced to one single cause but should be understood as a multilayered issue that has political, cultural, and material dimensions. Our research also shows that exclusionary attitudes toward Syrians partly reflect a more generalized xenophobia and are fueled by Turkey’s own internal social cleavages. Therefore, one should be skeptical about the claim that Turkish society is united in its opposition to Syrian refugees and instead consider the fact that different social segments may display hostility toward refugees for different reasons. Policies and initiatives aimed at contributing to social harmony between the local populace and international migrants must take this multidimensional nature of the problem into account and develop projects that would mitigate the anxieties of different political and socioeconomic groups. Part 6 proposes a series of policies with the aim of contributing to such initiatives in addition to summarizing our research findings.

2

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Made possible thanks to a generous support by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey, this study used a mixed-methods approach in which the qualitative component informed and shaped the quantitative component. In the first stage of our research, we conducted 16 focus group discussions with men and women from various social segments in Istanbul. We also conducted in-depth interviews with 32 individuals selected from these focus groups. The interactive nature of the focus group method helped us zoom in on how our participants constructed common narratives about Syrian refugees. In the in-depth interviews, we aimed to collect the personal stories and experiences of interviewees and to interpret their attitudes toward refugees in light of these stories and experiences.

Findings from both the focus groups and in-depth interviews played a key role in shaping the questions we later asked in our survey. For instance, during the focus groups, we observed our participants frequently refer to other international migrants when discussing issues about Syrian refugees. This led us to involve in our survey instrument questions measuring respondents' sentiments about several other immigrant groups with a sizeable presence in Istanbul. The strategy to build the quantitative stage on qualitative findings allowed us to take into account the specific characteristics of the local context and to avoid a top-down perspective that merely repeats the Euro-centric literature on migration attitudes.

2.1 THE QUALITATIVE STAGE

In the first stage of our study, we conducted 16 focus groups with participants from different political and social groups. These were held between 7 and 21 November 2019 at the Beşiktaş Office of the research firm *7P Think Tank Group*. One-hundred and three individuals attended these focus groups. Fifty-seven were men (in 9 groups) and forty-six were women (in 7 groups). Focus groups with female participants were moderated by a professional female moderator who have a master's degree on immigration. We ourselves moderated the focus groups with male participants as project coordinators with academic research experience.

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We stratified our participants by ethnic identity (Turkish/Kurdish), religious sect (Sunni/Alevi), lifestyle (conservative/secular), social class (upper middle-lower middle), and gender (female/male).

In deciding on participant profiles and forming the focus groups, we made use of a nationally representative survey conducted by KONDA in February 2016.¹⁸ Based on our preliminary analysis of the raw data from this survey, we stratified our participants by ethnic identity (Turkish/Kurdish), religious sect (Sunni/Alevi), lifestyle (conservative/secular), social class (upper middle-lower middle), and gender (female/male). Not only did this make comparative analyses possible, but it also facilitated the creation of a healthy discussion environment by preventing possible hierarchies or tensions among participants.¹⁹

We conducted a total of eight focus group discussions with conservative Sunni-Turkish participants, four with men and four with women. Because our statistical analyses of KONDA data hinted at an economically grounded differentiation in views about Syrian refugees in this social group, we organized separate focus groups with lower-middle class and upper-middle class conservative participants. In determining the participants' social class, we considered both household income and the district of residence.²⁰ Upper-middle class participants were selected from three districts, Başakşehir, Fatih, and Üsküdar, which are areas with a dense population of conservative middle classes. Lower-middle class participants were selected from five districts with lower standards of living and a high concentration of Syrian refugees: Bağcılar, Esenler, Esenyurt, Sultanbeyli, and Sultangazi. Participants from Zeytinburnu, an older district that nonetheless hosts many refugees, were included in both groups.

We conducted four focus groups discussions with secular Sunni-Turkish participants, two of these being with women and two with men. We did not stratify these groups by household income. Our preliminary analyses showed that income levels did not significantly impact this social segment's views of Syrian refugees. However, based on the assumption that spatial factors might have an impact on perceptions of and attitudes toward refugees, we selected our secular participants from two different geographical sets. We placed Ataşehir, Bakırköy, Beşiktaş, Kadıköy, and Şişli—wealthier secular centers—in the first set. In the second set were more peripheral districts with greater concentrations of Syrian refugees: Avcılar, Bahçelievler, Esenyurt, Küçükçekmece, and Sancaktepe. Again, Zeytinburnu was included in both groups.

In addition, we conducted two focus groups each with Alevi and Kurdish citizens. Given that the Alevis tend to be similar with secular Sunni individuals in terms of their lifestyle and political attitudes, we stratified Alevi participants only by gender. Just like Sunni Turks, we stratified Kurdish participants on the conservative-secular axis, and because we did not have the opportunity to conduct more than two focus groups, we limited our sample to men. Our Kurdish participants were selected from Bağcılar, Esenyurt, Küçükçekmece, Sancaktepe, Sultanbeyli, Şişli, and Zeytinburnu, districts with dense Kurdish populations.

To be able to make meaningful comparisons, we used an identical interview guide in each of the focus groups. Meetings lasted an average of two hours. We reserved roughly half of this time for a collage exercise. As part of the exercise, we divided our focus group participants into two subgroups and gave each subgroup a set of magazines consisting of print publications with different contents (history, film, fashion etc.). After handing out the tools needed for the collage work, we explained the main theme of our meeting: “Living together with Syrian refugees.” We then asked focus group participants to express the positive or negative feelings and ideas this theme elicited in them by cutting out photos and headlines from the magazines we handed out. In this process, participants were given the opportunity to have discussions among their collage group and to prepare a collective visual narrative. Afterwards, we asked the groups to explain the visuals they prepared and promoted discussion on the themes that stood out. This method allowed us to access our participants’ genuine feelings and thoughts regarding a challenging societal question that also has political implications. Moreover, the open-ended nature of the collage technique enabled us to expand outside our initial hypotheses, revealing several unanticipated findings.

However, we also avoided a wholly unstructured discussion format. In the second half of the meetings, we used a series of questions to have the participants discuss certain key issues for our study—unless these issues were spontaneously brought up by the participants themselves. With these questions, we first investigated our participants’ threat perceptions regarding Syrian refugees. We addressed these perceptions under four headings: (1) socioeconomic threat perceptions, (2) religiosity- and lifestyle-based threat perceptions, (3) ethnic threat perceptions, and (4) security and safety-based threat perceptions. In addition, we asked our participants about their views on the four main discourses that promote positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees: (1) the discourse of religious brotherhood, (2) the discourse of historical and cultural ties, (3) the discourse of humanitarian responsibility, and (4) the discourse of political interests. While opening these topics to discussion, we paid attention to using a neutral language and avoiding leading questions.

For the second step of our project’s qualitative stage, we selected two participants from each focus group meeting for in-depth interviews. In this selection process, we prioritized individuals who presented us with significant data, had rich personal experiences with refugees, or differed from other participants in their views. We invited a total of 32 individuals, 14 women and 18 men, for in-depth interviews and all our invitations were accepted. We completed the interviews by 9 December 2019.

We began the in-depth interviews with questions about the participant’s biography, family background, level of education, and work experience. We also asked participants whether there is an experience of migration in their family history, and if yes, when and how they arrived in Istanbul, which districts they inhabited in in the past, which district they reside in now, what they are satisfied or unsatisfied about in their current neighborhood, and where they would like to live if they had the opportunity. Additionally, we asked our participants to describe the material conditions of their household and compare these conditions with those under which their own parents lived. After these questions, we inquired about the participant’s religious beliefs, ethnic identity, and political orientation. In the final section of the interviews, we asked participants a series of questions about Syrian refugees which we could not find the chance to ask during the focus group discussions. For instance, we asked where they encounter Syrian refugees in their everyday lives and with what frequency, whether they personally know any Syrians beyond superficial encounters, which sources they rely on to learn about Syrians, and whether their political preferences are affected by political parties’ stances on the issue of refugees. Taking our cue from the gender-based differences we observed during our focus group meetings, we also asked the participants what they think is the biggest threat Syrian refugees pose when seen from the perspective of women or men.

2.2 THE QUANTITATIVE STAGE

We started preparing our survey, the quantitative component of the present study, after making some progress in analyzing our qualitative data. This allowed us to make use of key findings from the focus groups and in-depth interviews in formulating our survey questions rather than relying only on the existing literature. As we will discuss in more detail in Part 5, we also conducted a survey experiment that tested whether the personal characteristics of Syrian refugees affect attitudes toward them. We finalized our survey instrument after a pilot study conducted from 27 May 2020 to 31 May 2020.

In selecting our sample, we used a multistage and stratified design. In the first stage, we collected key socioeconomic, demographic, and political data for the 959 neighborhoods in Istanbul. For political data, we relied on the general election held on 24 June 2018 and compiled the election results from the website of the Supreme Election Council (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu*, YSK).²¹ We accessed socioeconomic data via *Kent95: Veriye Dayalı Politika Aracı Projesi*, a project co-organized by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (*Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*, TESEV) and Kadir Has University's Istanbul Studies Center.²² Based on these data, we divided Istanbul's neighborhoods into 12 strata, differentiated by levels of socioeconomic development and political orientation. We also created a separate stratum for neighborhoods with dense populations of Alevi and Kurdish citizens. Using probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling, we selected a specified number of neighborhoods from each of these 14 strata. The number of neighborhoods and participants to be selected from each stratum was determined according to the percentage of Istanbul's total adult population that fell into that strata. This strategy did not only ensure the inclusion of neighborhoods with different political orientations and levels of development in our study, it also guaranteed that our sample was proportionally distributed across the strata. With the said method, we included in our study 111 neighborhoods from 34 of Istanbul's 39 districts.

In the next stage, we selected the streets where our fieldwork would begin. To do so, we first created a list of the streets in the sampled neighborhoods by using the website of the Ministry of Interior's Directorate General of Population and Citizenship Affairs (*Nüfus ve Vatandaşlık İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü*).²³ We then randomly selected two streets as the starting point of our fieldwork, with one of these streets being our first preference and the other being the substitute. Therefore, in all the neighborhoods, every street was equally likely to be included in our sample.

In selecting the participants, our final sampling units, we preferred quota sampling based on gender (female, male) and age (18-32, 33-46, 47+), a decision that was made considering the decline in survey response rates due to the pandemic. However, we designed a detailed field plan in order to minimize the discretion of survey administrators in selecting respondents. According to this plan, survey administrators started the screening process from the top floor of the building with the smallest door number on the selected street. Interviews per building was limited to a maximum of one. In case the targeted quotas could not be met in the selected street, the field administrators were instructed to turn to the intersecting street and continue seeking respondents until they circle the entire block. If the neighborhood quotas were still not met, the fieldworkers proceeded on to the streets designated as substitutes. There, too, the same rules were observed.

The survey was administered from 18 July 2020 through 30 August 2020 by 158 survey administrators and 14 supervisors connected with the Fütürist Research and Consultancy Inc. The interviews were conducted through computer-assisted personal interviewing and with strict adherence to social distancing guidelines. A total of 2,284 respondents were interviewed from 111 neighborhoods located in 34 districts of Istanbul.

Finally, in order to better represent Istanbul’s adult population, we employed the calibration method, which is widely used in public opinion research. In other words, we made a weight adjustment to make our sample compatible with reliable external sources in terms of the distribution of certain basic variables. For this procedure, we used the results of the 24 June 2018 parliamentary election taken from the YSK as well as several statistical measures compiled from the Turkish Statistics Institute (*Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu*, TÜİK), such as population by age group,²⁴ level of education by gender,²⁵ and some workforce statistics.²⁶ For the calibration procedure, we used the “ipfraking” program included in the Stata statistical software package.²⁷ The figures below show the distribution of key demographic variables after calibration. Accordingly, 50.36 percent of our sample consisted of women and 49.64 percent consisted of men (Figure 2.1). As for age distribution, participants were proportionally distributed to the three age groups: 18-32, 33-46 and 47+ (Figure 2.2). Mean age was 39.16.

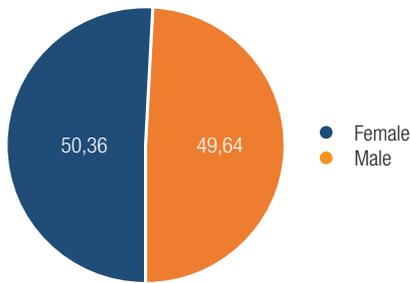


Figure 2.1 Distribution by Gender (%)

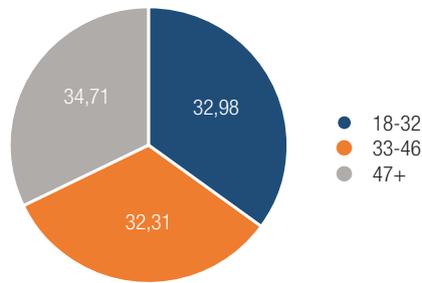


Figure 2.2 Distribution by Age (%)

When grouped according to levels of education, 47.94 percent of our participants did not have a high school diploma. This group had the biggest share in our sample. High school graduates made up 27.53 percent and college graduates made up 24.54 percent of our sample (Figure 2.3). In terms of marital status, 60.4 percent of our participants were married, and 32.4 percent were single. Meanwhile, 3.9 percent of our sample was divorced, and 3.29 percent were widowed (Figure 2.4).

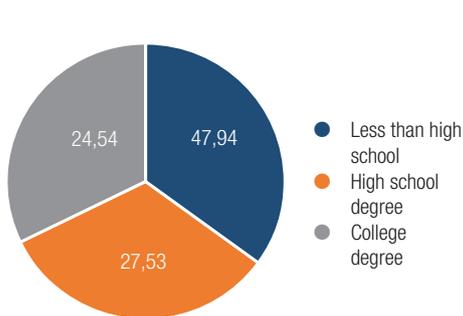


Figure 2.3 Distribution by Level of Education (%)

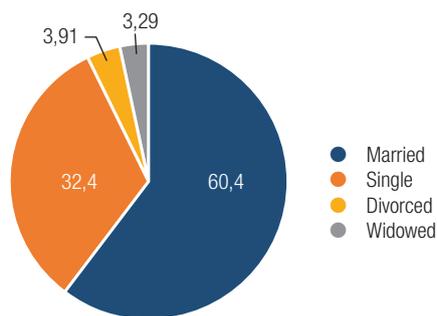


Figure 2.4 Distribution by Marital Status (%)

When we look at distribution by employment status, we see that wage-workers constituted the largest group with 49.08 percent. They were followed by housewives, who made up 18.14 percent, and the self-employed, who made up 10.2 percent. In addition, 9.04 percent were unemployed, 8.91 percent were retired, and 4.63 percent were students (Figure 2.5). In terms of monthly household income, those who earned TRY2500-3000 made up 30.64 percent of our sample and were the largest group. They were followed by those who earned TRY3501-5000, a group that made up 27.74 percent. Meanwhile, 20.04 percent of our respondents earned

less than TRY2500, and 15.04 percent earned TRY5001-7500. Those with monthly household incomes above TRY7500 constituted only 6.55 percent of the sample (Figure 2.6).

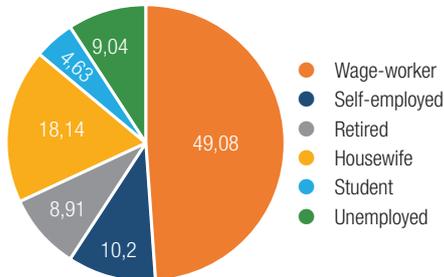


Figure 2.5 Distribution by Employment Status (%)

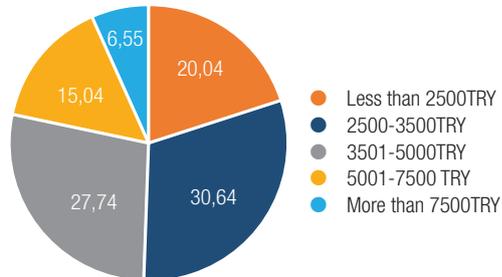


Figure 2.6 Distribution by Monthly Household Income (%)

In terms of ethnic origin, 82.89 percent of our sample self-identified as Turkish. Those who said they were ethnically Kurdish or Zaza stood at 16.61 percent (Figure 2.7). When we look at distribution by religious identity, we see that the majority of our participants, 86.47 percent, were Sunni Muslims. Alevi, who constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey, comprised 10.41 percent of the sample. Those who identified neither as Sunni nor as Alevi constituted only 3.12 percent (Figure 2.8).

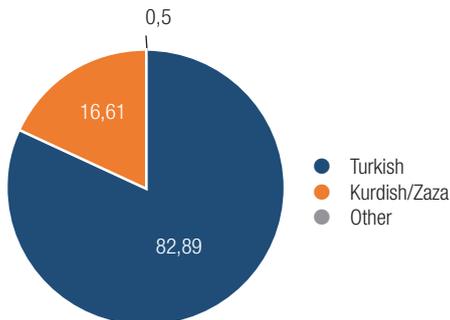


Figure 2.7 Distribution by Ethnic Identity (%)

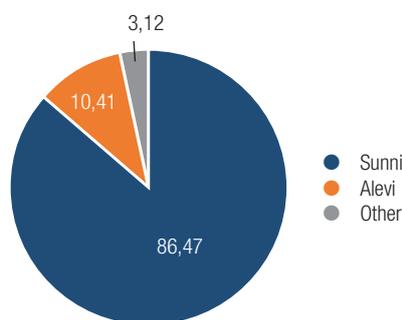


Figure 2.8 Distribution by Religious Identity (%)

Finally, when we examined our respondents' answers to the question "Which party would you vote for if general elections were held today," we observed that AK Parti voters constituted the largest group with 37.37 percent. They were followed by CHP voters (23.56 percent), HDP voters (11.03 percent), Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) voters (7.29 percent), and İYİ Parti voters (7.16 percent). Those who were "undecided" or declared that they would "not vote" constituted 11.89 percent of the sample (Figure 2.9).

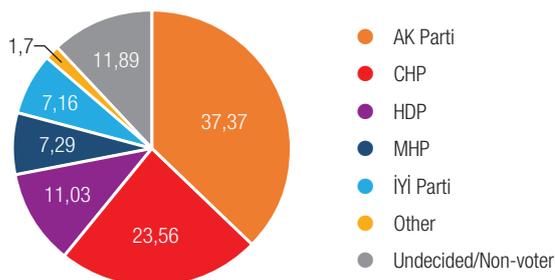


Figure 2.9 Distribution by Party Preference (%)

3

PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SYRIAN REFUGEES IN ISTANBUL

Relying on our survey, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews, we discuss in this section perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees among Turkish citizens aged 18 and over who reside in Istanbul. We address these perceptions and attitudes under two main sections. In the first section, we discuss the cultural, emotional, and social distance between natives and refugees. In the second section, we examine Istanbulites' policy preferences about several issues concerning Syrian refugees. To give an idea of the social differentiation in attitudes toward Syrians, we categorize our participants' opinions by partisan identity in both sections. Later, in Part 4, we analyze in more detail the main factors shaping natives' views of Syrians.

3.1 CULTURAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SOCIAL DISTANCE TOWARD SYRIAN REFUGEES

3.1.1 Levels of Agreement with Political Discourses about Syrian Refugees

Discourses about immigrants and refugees produced in the political arena and traditional and social media platforms play a significant role in shaping natives' perceptions of and attitudes toward these groups.²⁸ Moreover, politicians and media organizations can activate pre-existing social stereotypes about migrants through the language they use and in this way direct citizens' political behaviors.²⁹ Therefore, it is important to identify the degree to which natives agree with the positive or negative discourses about migrants circulating in the public sphere. For this purpose, we asked our interviewees whether they agreed with some of the discourses employed by politicians and reproduced in the media when describing Syrian refugees.

According to our findings, discourses that marginalize refugees and position them as a threat to the local population receive a high degree of public support. As can be seen in Figure 3.1, 64.48 percent of our participants agree with the statement "Syrian refugees are an economic

burden on us,” while 66.14 percent agree that “Syrian refugees receive privileged treatment compared to Turkish citizens.” By contrast, definitions of Syrians as “guests,” “the oppressed,” or “brothers-in-religion,” definitions circulated by AK Parti leaders to countervail exclusionary reactions against refugees, have lower levels of agreement.³⁰ Nonetheless, those who agree with these discourses, which allow a degree of empathy with refugees, outnumber those who disagree with them. Our findings show that 53.70 percent agree with the statement “Syrian refugees have fled oppression,” whereas only 28.70 percent disagree. Similarly, those who agree with (44.74 percent) the religious brotherhood discourse expressed through the Islamic *ansar-muhajir* analogy outnumber those who disagree (35.76 percent). Roughly equal percentages agree (40.93 percent) and disagree (38.45 percent) with the definition of Syrians as “guests.”

64.48 percent of our participants agree with the statement “Syrian refugees are an economic burden on us,” while 66.14 percent agree that “Syrian refugees receive privileged treatment compared to Turkish citizens.”

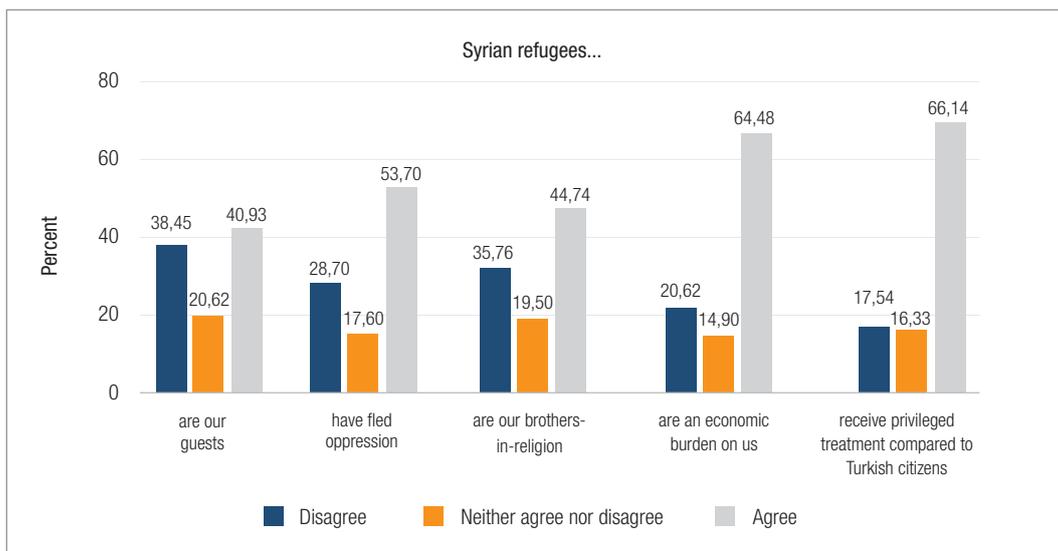


Figure 3.1 Levels of Agreement with Some Widely Used Descriptions of Syrians

As can be seen in Figure 3.2, voters of different parties seem to concur that Syrians are an economic burden on society. Even among HDP voters, who are the most moderate voter group on this issue, more than half (52.05 percent) view the refugees as an economic burden on the local populace. By contrast, when we look at levels of agreement with the description of refugees as “the oppressed” and “brothers-in-religion,” we find significant partisan differences. As can be expected, the highest percentage of those who agree with these two definitions are among AK Parti supporters (70.63 percent and 61.99 percent, respectively). They are followed

Voters of different parties seem to concur that Syrians are an economic burden on society. By contrast, when we look at levels of agreement with the description of refugees as “the oppressed” and “brothers-in-religion,” we find significant partisan differences.

by voters of the MHP, AK Parti's partner-in-government (59.82 percent and 56.02 percent, respectively). The percentage of those who define Syrians as brothers-in-religion is as low as 22.19 percent among CHP voters and even lower (18.75 percent) among İYİ Parti voters. These two voter groups predominantly also oppose the description of Syrians as "the oppressed." The percentage of HDP voters who agree with these refugee-friendly discourses are situated midway between AK Parti-MHP voters and CHP-İYİ Parti voters.

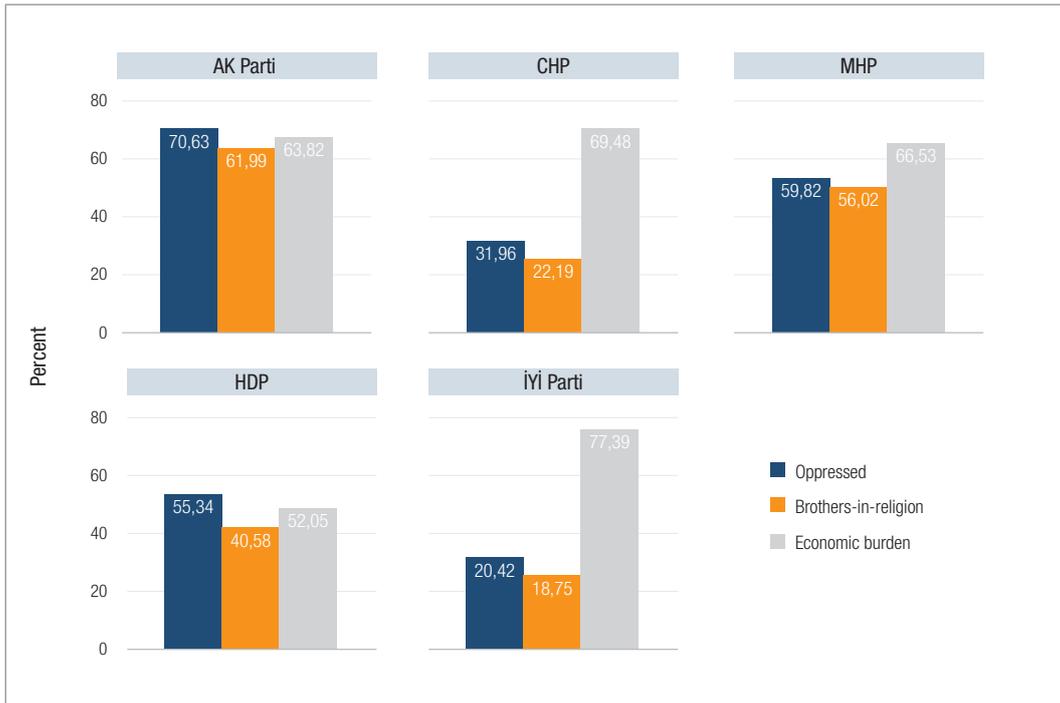


Figure 3.2 Party Preference and Levels of Agreement with Discourses about Syrian Refugees

The majority (58.53 percent) of those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse, which establishes a shared identity between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens, also define Syrians as an economic burden.

The most striking finding here is that from the perspective of citizens, discourses that promote tolerance for Syrians and discourses that treat marginalize them are not mutually exclusive. As can be seen in Figure 3.3, the majority (58.53 percent) of those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse, which establishes a shared identity between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens, also define Syrians as an economic burden. Similarly, 62.31 percent of

those who describe the refugees as brothers-in-religion also believe they receive privileged treatment compared to Turkish citizens (Figure 3.4).

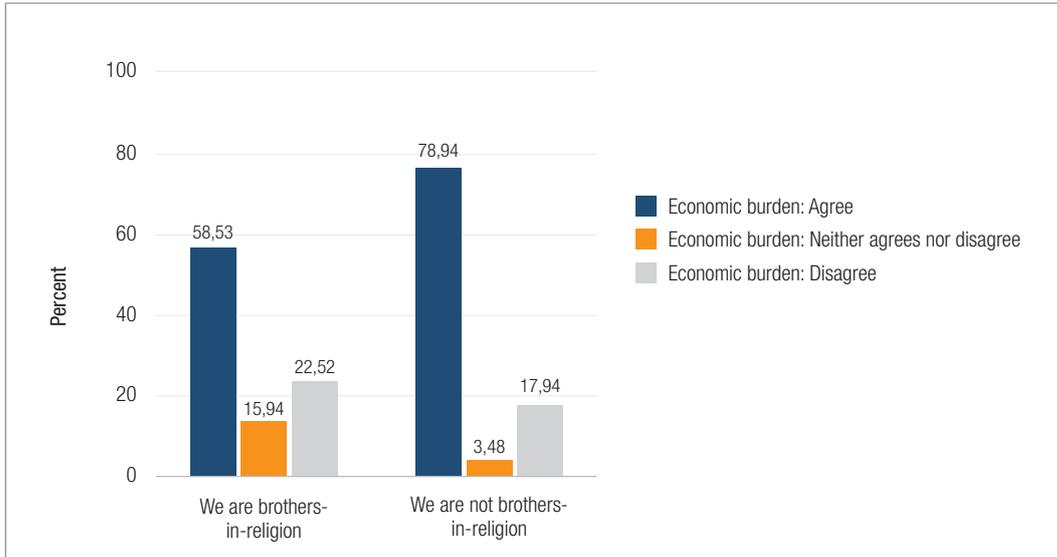


Figure 3.3 Religious Brotherhood and Definition of Syrians as Economic Burden

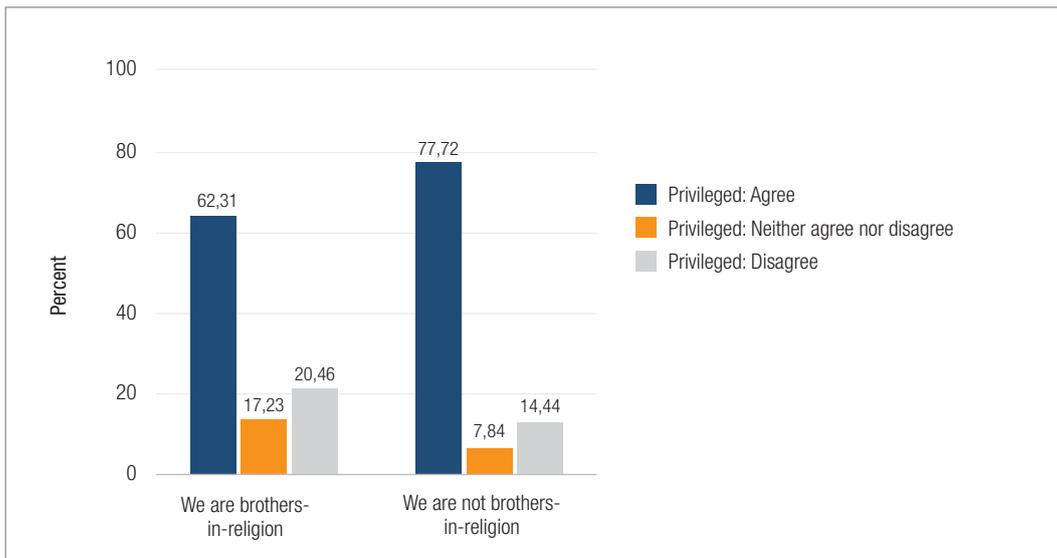


Figure 3.4 Religious Brotherhood and the Definition of Syrians as Privileged

Qualitative Findings

The same situation was observed in the focus group discussions as well, which played a significant role in shaping our survey questions. The majority of our respondents who described Syrians as oppressed or brothers-in-religion also emphasized what they believed to be refugee-driven economic troubles and expressed that they were economic victims. For example, during the collage exercise in a focus group with upper-middle class conservative women, participants came up with the heading “A single dress won’t fit three people,” which was striking as it shows how discourses that marginalize Syrians for economic reasons find support even among relatively high-income conservatives. When asked why they used this heading for the visual image of a dress, the spokesperson for the collage group explained in the following way:

A single dress won't fit three people. It will only fit one. By taking in others, they are trying to have three people fit into a single dress. And then it is us who faces this tightness and distress. It is the first one to put on the dress who faces these [challenges]. That means us.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 7 November 2019).

Similarly, in a different focus group discussion with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, the participants explained a visual composition consisting of a house with several balloons attached to it as follows:

That is the life of luxury. Because of them, a life of luxury is now only a dream. You'll have to save for 15 years to buy a house, you'll make the down payment, take out a bank loan, and then repay the loan for 15-20 years. This is now only a dream, [buying] new things is becoming a mere dream for us.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019)

The fact that many conservative participants who establish a common bond with Syrians through religious brotherhood also embrace discourses marginalizing them on the basis of economic factors indicates a tension between cultural identity and material interests. This tension was often articulated via expressions starting with the phrase “We are brothers-in-religion but”:

The fact that many conservative participants who establish a common bond with Syrians through religious brotherhood also embrace discourses marginalizing them on the basis of economic factors indicates a tension between cultural identity and material interests.

- Yes, we are brothers-in-religion, but you see, there are so many people in our country, too, who are in need. I don't want to share. Rather than me feeding [them], they should feed themselves by fighting in their own land. Or let us still send them assistance but let us do that as a state. Let's not do that in our country. I'd rather see the people of our own country prosper.

- ...

- It is very nice to help one another of course, but for that to happen, I should first be in good economic condition myself, which is not the case.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

I don't see why not as long as our economic means allow us. But Turkey does not have such power. I mean, Turkey appears to have [such power], but in reality, it doesn't. We keep using our stocks.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

Because we are not a country with a high level of welfare. If we were better industrialized, we could say, “Come my brother, we need the workforce, let’s prosper [together],” and we could have them work, but the truth is, our level of welfare is low.

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 19 November 2019).

Along the same lines, some conservative participants emphasized that their attitudes toward Syrians became stricter as the social and economic costs of hosting refugees increased:

In fact, when the refugees first entered our country, I had felt for them. I had even enjoyed the idea of being the only country that supported them in a very difficult period they were going through. I had never imagined things would come to this. I mean, I thought this was a [temporary] process, and that it would not last that long. Did we support them in their hard times? Did we protect them? Did we allow them to have shelter, to live, to survive? We did. But now, they are giving us a hard time. They started making our own life difficult for us, in our own country.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 7 November 2019).

3.1.2 Cultural Distance from Syrian Refugees

In the past nine years since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, the AK Parti government did not only emphasize a shared religious identity with the refugees, it also built a narrative of shared history with Syrians through references to the Ottoman Empire’s 400 years of rule over the Middle East. However, studies show that the citizens of Turkey have a very limited sense of cultural similarity with Syrian refugees.³¹ Our study, which is representative of Istanbul’s population, reveals a similar result. 49.27 percent of our respondents did not agree with the statement “Syrian refugees are culturally similar to us.” Those who did stood at 32.10 percent (Figure 3.5). These findings indicate that the people of Istanbul maintain a significant degree of cultural distance from Syrian refugees.

49.27 percent of our respondents did not agree with the statement “Syrian refugees are culturally similar to us.” Those who did stood at 32.10 percent

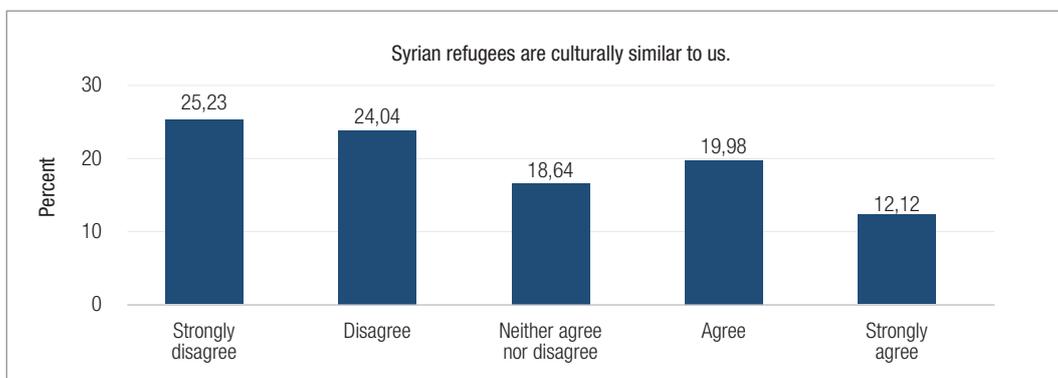


Figure 3.5 Perceptions of Cultural Similarity with Syrian Refugees

60.07 percent of those who see Syrians as brothers-in-religion support the statement about cultural similarity, whereas that figure is only 5.08 percent among those who do not see Syrians as brothers-in-religion.

Unsurprisingly, the percentage of those who agree with the statement of cultural similarity are higher among those who see Syrians as brothers-in-religion. As demonstrated in Figure 3.6, 60.07 percent of those who see Syrians as brothers-in-religion support the statement about cultural similarity, whereas that figure is only 5.08 percent among those who do not see Syrians as brothers-in-religion. One can therefore argue that common identity construction on the basis of Muslimness plays an important role in shaping Turkish citizens' perceptions of cultural distance with Syrians. However, one must also consider the fact that among those who regard Syrians as brothers-in-religion, 24.40 percent disagree with the statement about cultural similarity and 15.52 percent neither agree nor disagree.

In other words, some of the citizens who endorse the religious brotherhood discourse also culturally marginalize Syrians and exclude them from the community they describe as "We."

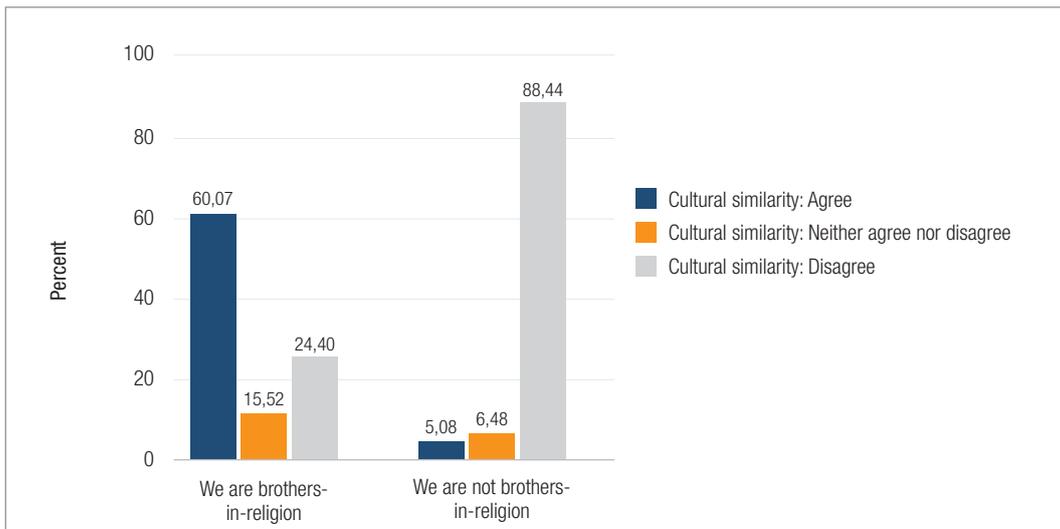


Figure 3.6 Religious Brotherhood and Perceptions of Cultural Similarity with Syrians

The relation between perceptions of cultural similarity and partisanship provides us with some clues to make sense of this finding. As can be seen in Figure 3.7, the level of agreement with the cultural similarity argument is as high as 47 percent among AK Parti voters. But among MHP voters, the group with the next highest level of agreement with the religious brotherhood discourse, that figure falls to 19.14 percent. This suggests that among voters with strong nationalist sentiments, shared religious identity is not enough for cultivating a sense of cultural proximity with Syrian refugees. As a matter of fact, only 30.95 percent of those MHP supporters who regard Syrians as religious brothers agree with the cultural similarity statement. This ratio goes up to 69 percent among AK Parti voters who see Syrians as religious brothers.

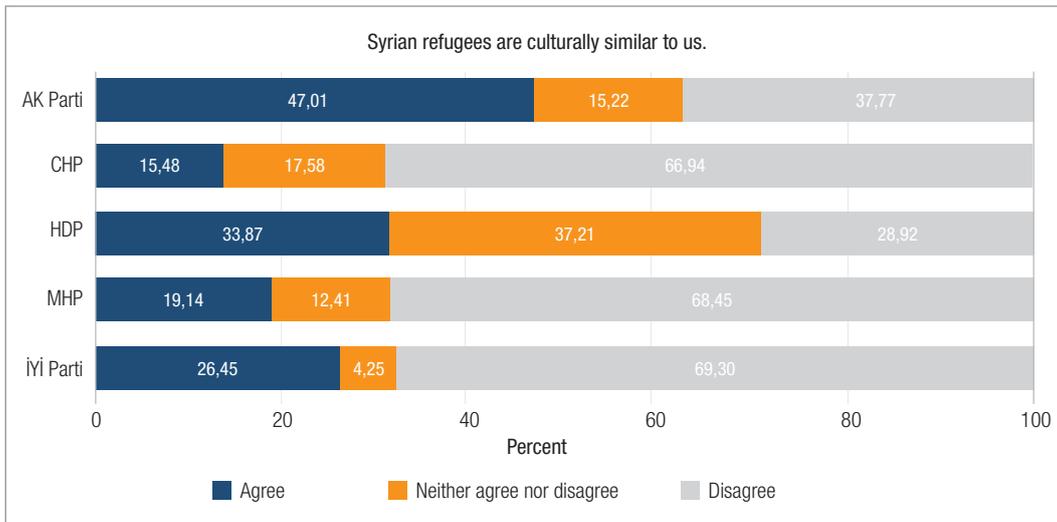


Figure 3.7 Party Preference and Perceptions of Cultural Similarity with Syrian Refugees

Qualitative Findings

Focus group discussions, too, revealed the inadequacy of shared religious identity for establishing cultural proximity with Syrians. For instance, some nationalist conservative participants saw the ethnic and national differences with Syrians as more important than religious commonalities:

Some nationalist conservative participants saw the ethnic and national differences with Syrians as more important than religious commonalities

You have your own flag, your own language, your own nationalist selfhood ... We say we are brothers-in-religion; that is not wrong, but after all, you have a national identity.
(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 14 November 2019)

- I am going to say something, something very important. Starting a century ago, Turks from the Caucasus, Crimea, Bulgaria, Western Thrace, Turks of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovinians, they were all brought and resettled here. These were all Turks who were brought, but it's no longer Turks who are brought here.

- There are Turcomans as well [among Syrian refugees].

- For the first time, the state's opening targets those with Arab origin. I mean, what percentage of those five million [Syrians] is Turkish?

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

In addition, some participants agreed with the religious brotherhood discourse but also argued that Syrians are culturally more backward than Turks:

Of course, Syrians are our brothers, too. I see them as our brothers, as brothers-in-religion. But they are backward compared to us.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 14 November 2019).

Turks are a bit more advanced. There are 50-60 years between us and the Syrians. They are what we were 50, 60, 70 years ago. ... They are more backward.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

Our analysis shows that this argument is particularly used with reference to poorer refugees; thus, it points to a class dimension at work in cultural exclusion:

*- I mean, they all live in basement floors. Even the way they hang their laundry is terrible. I think they have never been exposed to certain things, because if they had been, they would live like we do. Even the basics, like hanging laundry, is a sort of order for us.
- Hanging laundry is an art, no less.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

We feel unsettled in so many ways. Schools have been affected; classrooms have been affected. Culture has been affected. In our circles, some people even move out only because Syrians are living in the building. It is not a matter of looking down on them. It could have been us in that situation. But I don't want [to live nearby]. Their culture, ways of living, the food they eat, their sentences, their language, the way they dress... They are not vaccinated. I have a little baby; I don't want to be around them.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

But there were also conservative participants who completely rejected the religious brotherhood discourse. These participants questioned Syrians' piety especially by referring to issues such as habits of cleanliness, modesty in clothing, and worship practices. In doing so, they opposed the notion of religious commonality between the local and refugee communities:

There were also conservative participants who completely rejected the religious brotherhood discourse.

As far as I can observe, I don't think their sense of religion is the same as ours. Because they are terribly unclean human beings. Our religion is based on cleanliness. An unclean person cannot properly perform Salah.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

Perhaps if they weren't such a dirty people... But let me be honest. Arabs aren't so... Even our Prophet said, "I'm an Arab but Arabs do not belong with us."

(Focus group conservative Sunni Turkish men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

I witnessed this so many times; these men, in the month of Ramadan, they keep drinking coke and eating sunflower seeds. Garbage collectors who work on our taxes, on our payroll, then go and clean those seed mantles and coke bottles [that they litter]. When a single sanitation worker was once enough, we now need ten sanitation workers.

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 19 November 2019).

- I have not once seen a Syrian woman join a mukabele [Quran recitation ritual]. It's strange. Perhaps they came to Turkey and became too loose?

- It's like the saying, "The chicken watched the goose and then broke its leg trying to imitate the goose." They have become loose. They're far too relieved. They live in prosperity. It's as if their villages are not in war. All of them, they have in their hands the flashiest phones. They don't visit mosques or recite the Quran. I talk to the ones I see. The young girls are all out on the streets. I mean, it's strange.

- I also saw one who was in a burqa but with polished fingernails.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

Another noteworthy finding in this context are the expressions by some conservative female participants about their efforts to differentiate themselves from Syrian women:

- For example, we wear modest clothing, which means that we are people who try to live by our religion. But the more I see them, the more I feel like I'm changing. God forbid.

- Moderator: In what sense?

- Wearing pants, for example. My style is changing. It's like when you push someone too hard on something, they lose interest. God forbid, I'm not losing interest of course, but my style is changing just so that I don't look like them.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

- They have a different way of wearing their headscarves. They even smell different.

- For many years, I've been resisting against resembling them.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

3.1.3 Threat Perceptions Regarding Syrian Refugees

In the academic literature, local groups' threat perceptions regarding immigrants are seen as one of the most important factors in triggering anti-immigration and anti-immigrant attitudes. This literature can be divided into two main schools, one emphasizing social belonging and norms, the other emphasizing material interests.³² According to the first school, which builds on social identity theory³³ and symbolic racism studies,³⁴ native-born individuals' anti-immigrant reactions originate from their perceptions of newcomers as a threat to their group identities, cultural values, and lifestyles. Emphasizing "symbolic threats," this approach argues that the members of the majority group in any country will tend to exclude immigrants who are ethnically, religiously, culturally, and linguistically different from them. In contrast, the second school, influenced by realistic group conflict theory,³⁵ prioritizes "realistic threat" perceptions caused by competition over power and resources when explaining negative attitudes toward immigrants. According to this approach, the primary reason for anti-immigrant sentiment is the fact that host communities view newcomers as a threat to their political power, economic welfare, physical safety, or public health and order.³⁶

Building on this literature, we asked our respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree with a series of propositions that link Syrians to symbolic or realistic threats. However, rather than relying only on existing studies in formulating these threat statements, we benefited from the main themes that stood out during the qualitative stage of our study. Our findings are summarized in Figure 3.8. As can be seen there, the statement that had the highest level of agreement was “Syrian refugees reduce job opportunities for Turkish citizens,” which was supported by 70.81 percent of our respondents. This was followed by the statement “Syrian refugees upset the population balance in Turkey because they are having too many children,” with which 66.13 percent of the participants agreed. Nearly 60 percent supported the statement “Syrian refugees pose a threat to the modern lifestyle in our country.” Even the proposition “Syrians influence election results by voting” received more than 57 percent approval, despite the fact that it describes Syrians as a political threat and is therefore more likely to appeal to the voters of opposition parties.

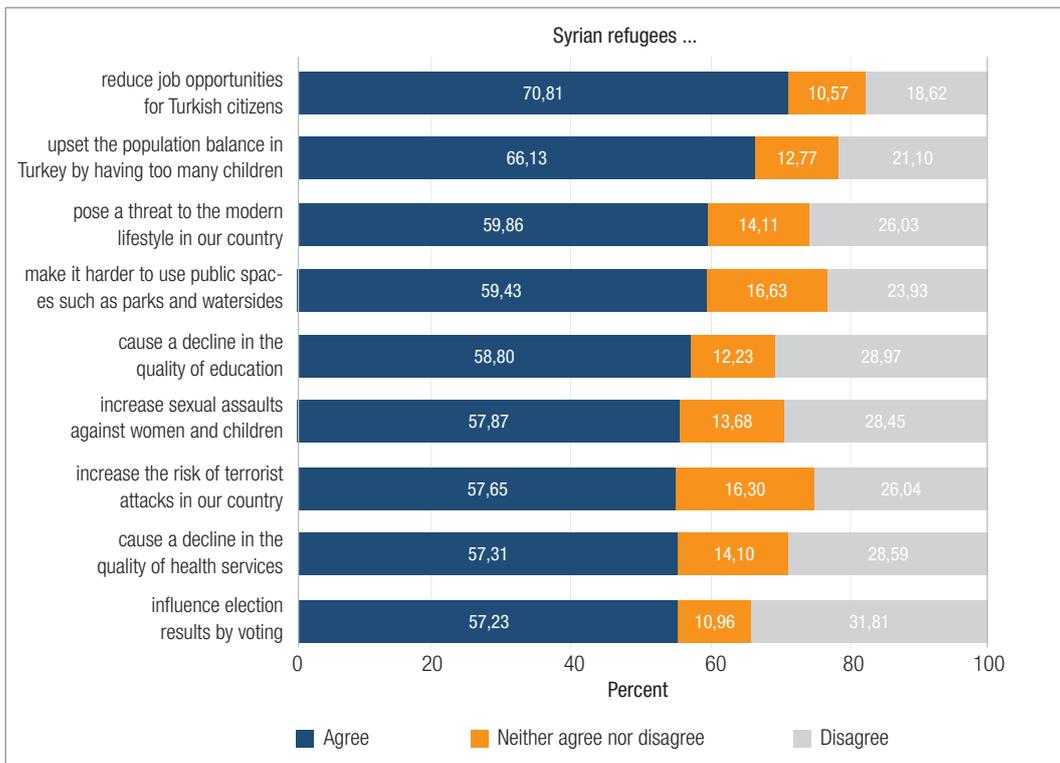


Figure 3.8 Levels of Agreement with Various Threat Perceptions Regarding Syrian Refugees

High levels of agreement with all the statements in the list suggest that negative opinions and emotions about Syrians are not limited to a particular social segment or issue but have become generalized. Nonetheless, Istanbul residents' threat perceptions regarding Syrians differ across partisan lines. These differences are presented in Table 3.1, which shows party averages for the nine different types of threat mentioned above. The averages were calculated according to a scale, where 1

AK Parti and HDP voters perceive Syrians as less of a threat than other voter groups. By contrast, CHP and İYİ Parti voters display above-average threat perceptions in almost every issue. MHP voters mostly stand somewhere between these two positions.

(“Strongly disagree”) represents the lowest level of threat perception and 5 (“Strongly agree”) represents the highest. As can be seen in the table, AK Parti and HDP voters perceive Syrians as less of a threat than other voter groups. By contrast, CHP and İYİ Parti voters display above-average threat perceptions in almost every issue. MHP voters mostly stand somewhere between these two positions. That said, it is MHP voters who agree most strongly with the proposition that Syrians reduce job opportunities for Turkish citizens. Moreover, MHP supporters tend to perceive the refugees as a threat to Turkey’s demographic structure. Another striking finding in the table is the extent to which HDP voters perceive Syrians as a political threat, which is close to the levels among CHP and İYİ Parti supporters. Consistent with our expectations, the tendency to perceive Syrians as a political threat is relatively weak among those who vote for the two governing parties, AK Parti and MHP.

Table 3.1 Threat Perceptions Regarding Syrians. Averages by Party Preference (1-5)

	AK Parti	CHP	HDP	MHP	İYİ Parti
Syrian refugees reduce job opportunities for Turkish citizens	3.49	4.16	3.67	4.27	4.13
Syrian refugees upset the population balance in Turkey because they are having too many children	3.37	4.07	3.28	3.90	4.19
Syrian refugees pose a threat to the modern lifestyle in our country	3.30	4.03	3.09	3.45	4.05
Because of Syrian refugees, locals find it harder to use public spaces such as parks and watersides	3.26	3.92	3.21	3.56	4.12
Because of Syrian refugees, the quality of education has declined	3.29	3.83	3.07	3.45	3.87
Because of Syrian refugees, sexual assaults against women and children have significantly increased	3.21	3.94	3.02	3.22	3.99
Syrian refugees increase the risk of terrorist attacks in our country	3.24	3.95	3.15	3.36	3.90
Because of Syrian refugees, the quality of health services has declined	3.24	3.86	3.06	3.51	3.84
Syrians influence election results by voting	2.75	4.18	3.80	3.13	4.06

Qualitative Findings

Economic threat perceptions

The idea that Syrian refugees working without social security and for lower wages reduce Turkish citizens’ employment chances and decrease their earnings was expressed in every single focus group discussion. There were also participants who held refugees responsible for rising apartment rents and high inflation:

I heard this from a friend who says in certain industries, like in the textiles, we are unable to find work. I asked him why, and he told me it’s because of the Syrians. Because [they] work for very low wages. And they work without social security. Whereas I would have been paid 6,000-7,000, they work for 3,000. The market average has gone down, we hear.

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019)

I, for instance, have a side job in the textiles. They employ Syrians and have them work uninsured. Wages have gone down. Electricity bills and rents have gone up.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019)

To begin with, unemployment in Turkey has greatly increased due to Syrians. There are almost 3 to 5 million Syrians who work uninsured in unlicensed workshops.

(Focus group with secular Kurdish men, 18 November 2019).

I had a very decent job. I took good care of my family. I never asked for unrealistic prices. After the Syrians came... Okay, the Syrians may come but they should retain a sense of morality and work with a sense of morality. If we work for a certain price, you [Syrians] should also work for the same price. Why work for 3 liras?

(Focus group with conservative Kurdish men, 20 November 2019).

Economically grounded complaints about Syrians were often expressed with reference to the participants' anxieties about the future of their own children or about the nation's youth in general:

Unemployment is at extremely high levels. But they work without social security. Our people, our children lose their dreams. It's the dreams of our children that are lost.

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 11 November 2019).

No one else is given the privileges that these people [Syrian refugees] are given. This friend [points to a young participant in the group], he has just finished college, what will they do? If he doesn't file [his documents], he will be charged a Social Security premium. What will he do if he can't pay? This child will receive a penalty, but he [the Syrian] won't. Look, you have a child, too [addresses the moderator]. There are those with kids. Or they are young. People who are younger than us. Everyone is fighting to make a living.

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 14 November 2019).

Nonetheless, there were also participants who argued that the refugee population can have a positive impact on the national economy. For instance, some defended the idea that Syrian refugees can make a significant contribution to the economy through consumption:

There were also participants who argued that the refugee population can have a positive impact on the national economy.

I think it's very ugly for a Turk, for a citizen to say, "Get the hell out of our country." To follow a very simple logic, as someone who is not particularly learned, let me assume that the number [of Syrians] is 3.5 million. Let's say each person pays 1 lira to the nation's cash register.... I mean, I'm following a simple logic. If 3.5 million people each buy a bread for 1 lira, only their bread [consumption] would create 3.5 million [liras] of turnover.

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

Some other participants suggested that the integration of Syrian youth through education can benefit the nation:

Remember that we don't have a young population. Here you have a young population. They are Muslims, we are Muslims, too. Rather than exclude them, we should take them in, perhaps subject them to education. They can be educated according to our culture.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

There were also participants who expressed the idea Syrian refugees can be employed in burdensome jobs that Turkish citizens are unwilling to do:

- *The only way they benefit us is in these bad jobs, or I shouldn't say bad, these burdensome jobs. In the industrial sectors, for example in metal works, this is always an issue, they can't find men to do certain jobs. Our own people, they finish high school or an average university, and then they have their noses up in the air. You ask, "Which school did you graduate from?" They say the name of some department in some obscure school. You don't even know the name of the department, but you should see the man, he's so full of himself. Of course, in the workplace, this man is not happy with any of the jobs. But these [Syrians], when you offer them 2,000 liras, they take the job with great joy.*
- *But he also puts the nation's economy in loss. After all, no one pays a social security premium on his behalf.*
- *Well, you see this as a loss, but in a certain sense, this is beneficial. [The workplace] employs a worker and production takes place there. Let's say, my brother produces parts for this heater, but he can't produce those parts otherwise. Thanks to that, you get the heater materials and the heater itself.*
- *It has two sides to it. As our friend says, there are benefits to having them employed but there are also harms. If the producer doesn't employ [Syrians], he is at a loss. That would also put the state at a loss. There are two sides to the story. There are wins and losses on both sides.*
- *The bottom line is, we must be better at picking and choosing. We are unable to pick and choose.*

(Focus group with Alevi men, 15 November 2019).

Demographic threat perceptions

The finding that 66.13% of our survey respondents agreed with the statement "Syrian refugees upset the population balance in Turkey because they are having too many children" points to a strong tendency to perceive refugees as a demographic threat. In focus group discussions with participants from different social segments, Syrians were frequently described as a group that reproduces in an uncontrolled manner. What is noteworthy is that demographic concerns about Syrian refugees were generally expressed by female participants and that they were usually offered spontaneously without the moderator asking any questions about the issue. Moreover, these concerns were articulated in a sexist perspective that assigns women and men to different social roles and establishes hierarchical relations between the two. The following statements from two different focus groups with secular women stand out for the way they reveal the gender dimensions of discriminatory attitudes toward Syrians:

In focus group discussions with participants from different social segments, Syrians were frequently described as a group that reproduces in an uncontrolled manner.

These are "Make love, not war" types!
(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 11 November 2019).

They should make war, not love!
(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

This exclusionary discourse blames young men of conscription age for escaping war (i.e., from the responsibilities of being a man), while also targeting women's bodies on the issue of sexual-

ity and fertility. This marginalizing attitude, which we can summarize with the concept of “gendered Syrianness,”³⁷ reproduces the hegemonic representations of femininity and masculinity in society.³⁸ In this perspective, children are no longer treated with empathy and protection as would be generally expected in situations of war. Instead, children stand for an irresponsible sexuality that Syrians are believed to pursue even under conditions of conflict and asylum:

- *This is what I oppose: you fled war. I, on the other hand, am in my own country and am not at war. I have a house; I have a place. But even though I'm in decent conditions, I only make one child. That's because I'm worried about the future. You fled war but how come you had the time to have 10 children? Yesterday I watched the news. Some place was bombed and [they are] fleeing with a 6-month-old baby. Why do you give birth in the middle of a war? You are in asylum here, why are you having babies? You should first find security, return to your country, and then do whatever you want. Why can't we have [children]? Because it's our future that is waning. Why is it that you don't have five children? Why do all of us limit ourselves to one or two?*
- *This is a matter of consciousness and perspective.*
- *Right? Otherwise, you'd be in a pitiful situation.*
- *In fact, you know, we're always told [by the president] to have at least three children.*
- *Okay, but why can't I? Because I'm worried about the future even though I own my apartment.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

The excerpt above is particularly interesting as it shows that despite the adoption of pronatalist population policies in the past decade, citizens have second thoughts about having children and they associate this hesitation with a sense of conscious and responsible parenthood. In this context, Syrian women are identified with uncontrolled fertility and blamed for acting irresponsibly. Though few in number, some participants even proposed measures like forced sterilization or imposing birth quotas for refugee women. However, for the most part these proposals did not find support among other focus group members:

- *I experienced that during my own pregnancy, At the time I was uninsured, and I ended up paying for it. Some people make things up and find a way through [the social security system], but I didn't do that. I wasn't working and I did not have social security. So, I paid the money. But I resented that. Because they [Syrian refugees] are cared for free of charge. Birth, birth, birth... They should just sterilize them.*
- *God forbid!*
- *No, no, don't say that!*
- (Laughter)
- *I mean, at least after the third child... There should be birth restrictions or there should be education on birth control.*
- *I think they certainly know what birth control is. [She] who knows how to conceive a child knows that, too.*
- *Primary care clinics already give that information.*
- *I'm sorry but I must say this. Even when animals are sterilized, people say that it violates animal rights. Sterilizing human beings is not a humane thing to do. This is not the right method.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

However, describing Syrian refugees who give birth with dehumanizing discourses such as “They are breeding” is something we encountered in many focus group discussions:

- *They conceive at great pace. They breed at great pace. In my own building, for example, there is a girl, only 16 years old, and she has 3 kids.*
- *Really?*
- *You can't be serious!*
- *That's right. She lives in my building. Think about it. She's only 16. They keep having babies. Her mother, her mother-in-law, they always have a baby in their hands.*
- ...
- *With this rate of birth and exploding population, we are under a horrible occupation. We'll soon be looking for a place to flee ourselves!*

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 7 November 2019).

Some other participants viewed childbearing by Syrian refugees as a planned and rational action for earning rights such as citizenship:

- *Ladies, I understand what you're saying but children are an advantage for them. Children are key for them to stay in this country and get citizenship.*
- *That's what I'm saying, this is why they should leave. They should not give birth here.*
- *Why [does she] give birth here? Why do they give birth here? Because they will receive citizenship [if they do].*
- *After how many children will [they] receive citizenship?*
- *It's not the number of children that counts. When the child is born here, [the child] becomes a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. It's not the number that matters. When the child becomes a citizen of the Republic of Turkey, the father also receives residence permit.*
- *Okay then, if it's enough to have only one child to receive this [permit], why [do they] have 10 children?*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

Threat perceptions regarding the modern lifestyle

The idea that Syrian refugees pose a threat to the modern lifestyle in Turkey was voiced especially by the secular participants in our focus groups. These participants highlighted the Syrians' Arab identity and depicted Arabicization as a development threatening their lifestyles:

The idea that Syrian refugees pose a threat to the modern lifestyle in Turkey was voiced especially by the secular participants in our focus groups.

Turkey is a secular country. The more these Arabs come, the more the country's social structure and cultural structure are deformed. The government also wants to go back to the past. The government exploits this situation. It was already a tough road to secularization.

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019)

- I think they live here without living by the rules of this society. They give the impression that they are saying “We’re here now and we belong here, it’s you who will adapt to us rather than we adapting to you.” Yes, we’re a Muslim country, but I believe we’re a modern country. And I also feel that because of the government, we are being Arabized. And these [the Syrians] are leading the way.

- ...

- Clothing, postures... It’s like the day will come and we’ll no longer be able to be modern and unveiled in our own country. We will be like in that picture, wearing headscarves.

(Focus group with Alevi women, 12 November 2019)

This is my personal opinion. I don’t want a religious way of life to be imposed [on me]. I don’t want people of Arabic descent in my country. I don’t mean this in an exclusionary way. ... I mean that I don’t want people with an Arabic and mullah way or philosophy of life in my country. In short, I want something like this: The Republic was founded as a modern, secular, and progressive country. I want this foundational infrastructure to exist again, I want the country to return to that same structure.

(Focus group with secular Kurdish men, 18 November 2019).

- I am from Bakırköy. I live and hang out around Bakırköy and Kadıköy. People freely eat and drink, walk around in short skirts. I also have a house in Esenyurt in [the gated community] Innovia. So I also sometimes go to Esenyurt. That is a whole different world. ... The country is like a watermelon, divided 50/50, right from the middle. One side is seriously radicalizing, the other side is seriously becoming atheist.

- [Moderator]: So, it is moving toward two extremes?

- Yes, of course, like two different poles. Like the northern and southern poles. You see what I mean, it’s divided in half.

- [Moderator]: Where do the Syrians stand in this picture? Do they have a role?

- Where do the Syrians stand? There, in the radicalizing, Islamizing side. If some incident were to break out here in the near future, they would be soldiers for the other side. They derive their living from that side.

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 21 November 2019).

However, expressions describing Syrian refugees in particular and Arabs in general as incompatible with the modern lifestyle in Turkey were also used by some conservative participants:

- [Moderator]: Okay, there is a poster here that says “time travel.”

- I put that up. I feel like they came to our country but it’s as if they travelled in time and lived in a time that was 30 years ago. They have no manners. They’re different even when walking down the street. For example, they [female refugees] don’t talk to men. But they go to the street market, and in the street market, you should see how intensely they bargain for goods. But when they see a man, they withdraw. If [conversing] with men is haram [illicit] there, then it is also haram [illicit] in the marketplace. That means you should pay the 10 lira price and not bargain. I see this as inconsistent. They have something like an old-time culture... Like they never modernized, they live in the culture of old times.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019)

- *Their women are normal women, just like our women. They dress more or less the same way. They sit and talk. There's no problem there, they can make a picnic. They can make women's days. That part is okay. But with the men, they might try to impose Arab culture on us. Because they can deform our social structure by their way of dressing.*

- *[Moderator]: You said the women are not different, but men are. What sort of differences do you see?*

- *I mean, for example, they come from Saudi Arabia, they walk around in slippers, they wear those white dresses. They put something on their heads, they walk around with that. They deform society visually. It's visual pollution.*

- *[Moderator]: Do you mean to say that this does not fit our way of life?*

- *It doesn't. Because you're not living in the desert. You're living here.*

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

We should also note that some secular participants opposed the idea that Syrian refugees are a threat to the modern lifestyle in Turkey:

- *Turkey already has a conservative social structure and a conservative mentality of government. The governing mentality is already increasingly becoming more conservative. Of course, they are doing this gradually, not suddenly all at once. As long as they remain [in power], they will keep doing this. This is why I don't believe Syrians will have any impact on this.*

- ...

- *I agree. As you say, we are already a very conservative society. ... I want to say something against what Mr. Burak said. He said this is not genuine Islam. But if we look at what Islam really is, it is not any different. We have to come to terms with this fact. What we should [instead] say is that living or not living in this [Islamic] way should be a matter of preference. I prefer not to live this way. But if you really think about it, this way of living is not particular to Syrians. There are people in Turkey who see Islam the same way and think that is real Islam and live that way.*

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 14 November 2019).

Threat perceptions regarding the use of public space

A frequently voiced complaint in the focus group discussions was that Syrians are making it difficult for local people to use public spaces such as parks, gardens, playgrounds, and watersides.

A frequently voiced complaint in the focus group discussions was that Syrians are making it difficult for local people to use public spaces such as parks, gardens, playgrounds, and watersides. These complaints often centered on young Syrian men, who were depicted as an idle crowd occupying public spaces that belong to Turkish citizens. References to hookah/narghile were common in these narra-

tives, in which young Syrian men were associated with the image of a privileged, carefree, and ill-mannered refugee:

- They rest in the day and live in the night. For instance, I saw this during the month of Ramadan, when I went for a walk with the kids after iftar time. In all the parks, gardens, and resorts... They even brought their hookahs.

- They are far too comfortable.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

On special days, holidays or during the Eid, when we go for a picnic, the one thing we see around the most are young Syrians. Last year when we went to the seaside, there were more of them than Turks.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

- Taking in women and children is normal to a certain degree, but we also took in men who are at the age of conscription.

- They are smoking hookahs.

- They go swimming in the sea, in groups of 10, 15, 20. When we have girlfriends, or mothers, and wives, they stare at them. And people feel disturbed by that. When that happens, no one can go swimming any longer.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

- Okay, let us still fight and pay them our duty of loyalty, but what do they do? They come here and smoke the hookah.

- They swim in the sea.

- Since they came, there is an abundance of smuggled tobacco in the market. At every corner, there is contraband tobacco being sold.

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

Okay, I empathize with that part. If a war breaks out tomorrow, I might also fear for my life and flee. But if I migrate to another country, I'd bleed inside and sit still and cry. I would not smoke the hookah and swim in the sea in my underpants.

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 21 November 2019).

What I'm against regarding the Syrians who've come here is this: those young [men] smoking hookah in the cafes and gathering and having fun in public squares. They are doing things that even we are unable to do today. I resent that. But as for women, kids, and the elderly, we should look after them. That is a matter of human conscience.

(Focus group with secular Kurdish men, 18 November 2019).

Threat perceptions regarding access to public services

Another prominent complaint in the focus group discussions was a perceived decline in the quality of education and health services because of refugees.

Another prominent complaint in the focus group discussions was a perceived decline in the quality of education and health services because of refugees. These complaints were particularly voiced by participants who reside in districts with denser populations of Syrian refugees. Connecting the problems with their children's education to refugees, these participants complained about crowded classrooms, the inability of teachers to invest enough time in their students, and even the possibility that their children might learn immoral habits from their refugee peers at school. These concerns were strong enough that some parents expressed their intention to relocate to districts with a sparser refugee population in order to improve the quality of their children's education:

- *My son is in pre-school now. He will be start first grade next year. Education is very strongly impacted. What I hear is that in some schools, Syrian children are taught Turkish in the lower floors while classes are held in the upper floors. This what I hear. ... And let's say [my child] is assigned to School A and there are Syrians there. I'd immediately start searching for a different school. Many people are changing their registered residential address. They are relocating. This school question is a great chaos for me. I don't know what to do.*

- *[Moderator]: Why? To avoid [your child] going to school together [with Syrians]?*
- *I mean, we have no other choice. Because the quality of my kid, the quality of the school will decline. Teachers can't do anything, they're educators. What can they do? They can't say, "I won't teach Syrians, I'll only teach Turks."*

- *Where will the teacher set the level at?*

- *What happens then? Just to have my child adapt to his [the Syrian student's] level, my child falls behind.*

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

- *My child is in the first grade. And there is a Syrian student in the class ... I think to myself: I wish the teacher would spend the time not on them [Syrian students] and instead teach our children another letter or speed up the program. [Syrian students] slow him down. [The teacher] tries to make adjustments. There is this difficult issue of integration.*

- ...

- *Our children's Turkish skills deteriorate. They [Syrian children] can't fully speak Turkish and our [children] start imitating them. They use foul language. There isn't a lot [of Syrian students] in our school, only one or two. But, as our friend said, in districts like Güngören, there are a lot. Say, there are three or four Syrians in a class of 20, this will worsen [our children's] manners.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

Problems related to university education were also brought up in focus group meetings. Some participants argued that Syrian refugees were given privileges in higher education and that this led to discrimination against Turkish citizens. Access to college without entrance exams,

special quotas for foreigners, and non-refundable scholarships were among the privileges our participants claimed were assigned to Syrian refugees:

- *The Prime Ministry scholarships, for example, are not given to every Turk. I mean your father or mother must be deceased, or you should be disabled. It's difficult to get. But it's given to them [Syrian refugees], and they aren't expected to pay it back. I'm really disturbed by that. Before my university entrance exams, I worked like a dog. I was obsessed with the idea of getting admitted to the Istanbul Technical University, and it harmed my psychological health. But there is a special exam they [Syrian refugees] take.*

- [Moderator]: *Is that so?*

- *Yes. And you know what that exam looks like? If everyone of us took that exam and did not even prepare for it, we'd all still qualify for medical schools. It's that easy.*

(Focus group secular Turkish women, 11 November 2019).

That they are admitted thanks to quotas instead of my child being accepted, that we're told "The spots are full, we can't take in your children." That gets you thinking whether the same thing will happen when the time comes for college admissions and whether they [Syrians] will be admitted without exams and prevent my child from being admitted.

(In-depth interview, conservative man in the upper-middle income group, 7 December 2019).

We encountered similar complaints also about health services. By referencing their own experiences or what they heard from others, participants argued that refugees accessed certain health services free-of-charge, while locals had to pay for the same services. The claim that Syrians are given priority in medical examinations was also brought up in multiple focus group discussions. In addition, there were participants who associated epidemic diseases with Syrian refugees:

- *Hospitals provide them free examinations, but I don't know if they get their medicine for free.*

- *I heard that they have a card. They are also given priority in the waiting lines.*

- [Moderator]: *Are you saying that as a Turkish citizen, I pay a fee if I'm uninsured and visit a hospital, but they don't?*

- *Yes, yes, they don't.*

- *That's also what I heard.*

- *I'm a hundred percent sure that they don't.*

- *They also have priority. Priority in waiting lines. They get ahead of you in the line.*

- *Yes. This even made it to the news.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

- *I once came across this myself. I paid about 30 liras at the pharmacy but [they] paid only 12 liras. And they objected even to that amount, they said it was too much.*

- [Moderator]: *Were you buying the same medication?*

- *Our bills were approximately the same amount. I said to myself, "How on earth does this happen? I pay taxes, I work under social security. How is it that I pay this much when they don't?" I mean the word refugee [sığınmacı] speaks for itself, they seek shelter [in someone else's place]. If you let refugees live a life of such luxury, this is where things will end.*

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

I was buying my medication from the pharmacy. I get a different bill depending on whether I go to a normal hospital or a university hospital. I pay about 80-90 liras in out-of-pocket payments. But Syrians get everything for free. I don't want that. [Syrians] even get medication for free.

(Focus group with Alevi women, 12 November 2019).

Since the arrival of Syrians, weird diseases have been breaking out. This is because they weren't a very clean people in their own country. We already lack in vaccination opportunities and now we have these extra diseases like the Rota virus or the foot-and-mouth disease.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

Nonetheless, there were also participants who supported providing refugees with health services on the grounds it was good for public health:

- [They] have no social security, nothing, but here they are, enjoying every kind of right. They can get operations. Their kids can benefit. And we face problems when we are uninsured.

- But if [the state] doesn't take care of them, then that will lead to epidemics. [The state] has no choice but to take care of them.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

Sexual threat perceptions

Many focus group participants claimed that Syrian refugees pose a sexual threat to women and children. We observed that stories about sexual harassment and assault were often based on hearsay, to which participants were exposed in their social milieu or on social media. When participants told their first-hand experiences, they often emphasized the sense of insecurity they felt due to the presence of young male refugees in public spaces such as parks or streets:

We observed that stories about sexual harassment and assault were often based on hearsay, to which participants were exposed in their social milieu or on social media.

I want to say something on the issue of protection. I always feel like having to defend myself. I mean, I fear that they will verbally abuse me or one of them will harass me. There are many [Syrians] where I live.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 7 November 2019).

When I go to a park, a children's playground, I don't want men loitering around. That is a playground for children. It is not a roadside service station. Go, sit outside. There are many of these [incidents] where I live. They are everywhere. They sleep in playgrounds, sit on the benches. Idle men, loitering around. And they are never alone. Always in

groups of two, three, or four. Back in the day, when we used to go for a walk in Taksim, we used to watch out for pickpockets. Nowadays, one fears being harassed by a crowd. (Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

After the Syrians came, incidents of violence increased by a lot. We hear all kinds of things, including the raping of kids. We hear too many of these. Violence against animals. I saw it with my own eyes. I go on those websites for animal [rights].
(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

- I came across this a few times on the streets. Two or three Syrians are walking on a street. When they see a lady, all of them, one by one, turn and stare [at her]. What is it that you want from this woman? What is it that you think of her? They stare right into her eyes, and eye her as they walk past her. What kind of behavior is that?
- Their own [women] cover all parts of their bodies, including the eyes.
- After all, their own country is full of [women wearing] burqas. When they come here, where there is modernity, they are perplexed.
(Focus group with Alevi men, 15 November 2019).

- I, for one, live in Bağcılar, and I'm afraid to go out.
- [Moderator]: Are you referring to the changes there?
- Yes. I can't take my wife and go on a walk in the evening, I can't take my kid to the park for a walk. He [a Syrian man] keeps staring at my wife like a cow staring at a passing train. Who would be okay with that? Would anyone tolerate this?
(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 19 November 2019).

Some participants acknowledged that sexual harassment is a widespread problem in Turkey irrespective of the refugees. Nonetheless, the common view was that the arrival of refugees caused an increase in cases of harassment:

- It was either this past summer or the year before. A group of 15-20 young Syrians were about to take a swim in the sea in Bakırköy beach. They were staring at and disturbing every girl and women around. How does that make one feel? What happens is that we end up not visiting those spaces anymore. We don't want to go there. Why? Because we keep thinking that those people are there.
- ...
- Excuse my French, but the truth is, we already had more than enough jackals among ourselves. And now, [Syrians] made things even worse.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

The issue of refugee women marrying male Turkish citizens as second wives was also spontaneously brought up in several focus group meetings. Especially in our discussions with conservative female participants, Syrian women were described as a sexual threat both because they might be attractive to Turkish men and because they were financially weak.

- *This is also dangerous for our men. Once a man's heart is no longer beating for his own wife, he might want to give a chance to a second one. This is becoming so wide-spread.*

- *Their [Syrian] women can very quickly marry a man because they have no jobs or economic security. [They think], "He shall take me as a wife and take care of me." ...*

- *Yes, she might want to have a house to take shelter in.*

- *... There are also those other stories. I sometimes watch the Müge Anlı Show on TV, and there are grifter gangs. They con old men.*

- *They are after easy money.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

- *You should see the Arabs!*

- *Same in Iran. You should see the makeup they wear. They have enough paint on their faces to paint a whole apartment.*

- *Nail polish, lipstick, all of that; they don't lack one bit!*

- *I fear that our men will be attracted to them.*

- *Oh God, that's an even more serious danger.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

These excerpts are interesting, for they show the sexualization of not only male but also female refugees. However, unlike with women, male refugees were rarely described as objects of desire. On the contrary, they were often described as "ugly" or "unclean":

- *[The men], on the other hand, are all ugly. I mean, they're kind of weird.*

- *Allah has abandoned them.*

- *I mean, bring 10 men here. And put 2 Syrians among them. They will immediately stand out.*

- *Eewwww.*

- *From what I hear, their women are crazy for Turkish men.*

- *Of course, they're.*

- *Of course, they're. All the world is crazy for Turkish men.*

- *Everyone is crazy for our men.*

- *Even Europeans are crazy for our men.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 7 November 2019).

One night, my husband and I were returning home from an evening out. We crossed the street where we would take the Metrobus. As we approached the Metrobus station, [we saw] 2-3 Syrian men, in their 20s or 30s, looking unclean, with unclean faces. As my husband and I passed them by, they said a couple weird words to me. My husband is a thin-skinned man, in general. I feared an incident would break out, so I held his arm and told him to walk away. I literally dragged him away.

(Focus group discussion with secular Turkish women, 11 November 2019).

Threat perceptions regarding national security

In our focus group discussions, too, Syrians were frequently described as a threat to national security.

According to our survey results, more than half of Istanbul residents agree with the statement “Syrian refugees increase the risk of terrorist attacks in our country.” In our focus group discussions, too, Syrians were frequently described as a threat to national security. These threat perceptions included concerns that people linked to terrorism can easily enter the country due to lack of control at

the borders and that the increasing refugee population may demand autonomy in the future:

- *We don't know who they are. They could be ISIS members. They may be Muslims, but there are so many examples of jihadism around.*
 - *Friends, the fact is that the state occasionally sponsors some groups. For instance, a Syrian by the name of Baghdadi was captured and killed in Istanbul. And then Trump announces this in his own style. The next day, our own president goes out and says, “He was captured in the city of Çankırı with his 13 wives and children,” or “The decapitator of ISIS was captured in his residence in Bolu,” or “He was captured in his private mansion in Kocaeli.”*
 - ...
 - *I mean, here is the deal. Of course, there is [a threat]. You might think that a thousand people in a population of four million [refugees] is a small number. But a thousand people is more than enough to turn Turkey into a bloodbath. There is a threat.*
- (Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

- *Can anyone guarantee that we won't have a Syrian question in the future? That [the Syrians] won't demand certain rights or a piece of land?*
 - *Just the other day, we discussed this with a friend of mine. They say that [Syrians] are buying houses. I told my friend that all our land is being sold. We were discussing and my friend said, “We're not selling land, we're only selling apartments.” But isn't selling houses the same as selling land? Am I wrong to think this way?*
- (Focus group with Alevi women, 12 November 2019).

It is predicted that 5-6 years from now, Syrians will outnumber Turks among the voters in Hatay. There are many cities like that in Turkey. I see this as an issue that we, as Turkey, failed to seriously govern, or for which we weren't prepared. An issue that developed spontaneously and to which we merely responded to with ad hoc measures. This process started 7-8 years ago. Many politicians, professors, people who keep a close eye on this, they keep discussing it. But at the end of the day, if you look at it, Turkey has security vulnerabilities.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

Political threat perceptions

Concerns about Syrians tipping the political balance by voting in elections were prominent especially in focus group discussions with secular participants.

Concerns about Syrians tipping the political balance by voting in elections were prominent especially in focus group discussions with secular participants. Some participants in these focus groups argued that the government had precisely this political goal in mind when admitting Syrian refugees into Turkey:

I'm okay with them coming and taking refuge, but what's bad is that the man at the top doesn't say that. He says, "They shall come and feel grateful to me and vote for me." So, many Syrians are saying, "It's thanks to him that I'm not hungry, it's thanks to him that my child is in school, it's he who gives me privileges. Great, so I should vote for him." He has extended citizenship to many [Syrians].

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 11 November 2019).

- *There is no doubt that they voted.*
- *They were given ID cards and citizen ID numbers.*
- *...*
- *They definitely voted.*
- *Of course, that's why they were brought here in the first place.*
- *I am one thousand percent sure.*
- *De-fi-nite-ly!*
- *That was the goal to begin with.*
- *And that is why they weren't sent back afterwards. Because if they had been, this whole game would be laid bare. People would start questioning why they left right after the elections.*

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

- *When the election day comes, as you say, these [Syrians] are votes to be harvested. We'll see what kind of [rights] they will be given. Who knows, maybe they will line up with us and vote.*
- *They have already got citizenship. Nearly one million citizenships were handed to the Syrians. They are stuck with us now. They will remain.*
- *Game over, friends, it's already done.*
- *And the rest will be integrated gradually.*
- *... The Syrian question is not a question of migration. Migration is called the hijra. The migration from Mecca to Medina is called the hijra. Here you have a geography that gives you all kinds of opportunities, a place where you reap what you sow, where there is water to keep you alive. The hijra is a migration from one place to another. Taking Syrians in is not a form of migration. It's a political matter. It's a matter of rent-seeking.*

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 21 November 2019).

Conservative participants, on the other hand, disagreed with such claims, arguing that the government's refugee policy has cost it many votes:

This is a political risk. You may lose the election today while thinking that “[Syrians] will vote for me in elections ten years later.” This is not a measurable thing. Perhaps the government lost this recent [local] election because of the Syrians. “The government let them in, gave them citizenship, gave them the right to vote,” etc. Maybe it is this discourse why [the governing party] lost. This is a risky decision. That’s why I don’t think there’s a direct correlation between extending citizenship [to Syrians] and increasing [the government’s] votes.

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

- *I don’t think that’s true.*
- *I think this is why the president has lost some votes.*
- *Yes, that’s right.*
- *I agree, he’s lost many votes.*
- ...
- *[Moderator]: Leaving aside for a minute the question of whether [Syrians] actually voted or not, what would you say about the idea that they were brought here so that they would vote?*
- *I highly doubt that.*
- *Me too, I doubt that to be the case.*
- *[The government] has lost way more votes than the number of votes it might receive [in the future].*

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

As we discussed in the previous section, however, conservative participants expressed concerns that Syrian refugees might form a political power and pose a security threat in regions where they make up a significant portion of the local population:

However, conservative participants expressed concerns that Syrian refugees might form a political power and pose a security threat in regions where they make up a significant portion of the local population

The more they breed and reproduce... If a district ends up having only 10,000 Turks remaining while the Syrian population rises to 20,000, this will change the country’s structure 15 years later. They may even elect municipal mayors or district governors.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019)

- *In Kilis, the latest numbers are such that the Syrian population is triple the Turkish population.*
- *Three times. If there was a referendum today, Kilis would be lost [translator’s note: refers to the plebiscite that was held in the border city of Hatay in 1939, when the local population voted to become a Turkish, instead of a Syrian, territory].*

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

3.1.4 Emotional Distance from Syrian Refugees

Besides anxiety and threat perceptions, many other positive or negative emotions such as anger, hatred, disgust, envy, pity, admiration, or guilt are known to play a key role in intergroup relations.³⁹ For this reason, it is important to reveal individuals' emotional states toward outgroup members. In studies of intergroup relations, one method of measurement used for this purpose is an instrument called the feeling thermometer.⁴⁰ This method, in which respondents indicate their feelings toward a target group on a bipolar scale ranging from cold-negative to hot-positive, can be thought of as measuring individuals' emotional distance from an outgroup. In our survey, we used a simplified version of the feeling thermometer and asked respondents to grade their feelings toward Syrian refugees on a scale of 0 ("Very negative, cold") to 10 ("Very positive, hot"). In addition, we asked our respondents to grade their feelings toward Uzbek, African, and Armenian immigrants who constitute a significant population in Istanbul.

Even African immigrants, who received the warmest responses on average, were graded 3.31 over a scale of 10.

Our results show that Istanbul residents hold highly negative feelings toward the main immigrant groups living in their city (Figure 3.9). Even African immigrants, who received the warmest responses on average, were graded 3.31 over a scale of 10. These findings suggest that negative attitudes and behaviors toward Syrian refugees are not an exception, and that despite its frequent portrayal as a "world city" or a "capital of cultures," Istanbul is faced with a severe problem of xenophobia.

We will analyze this in more detail in Part 4.

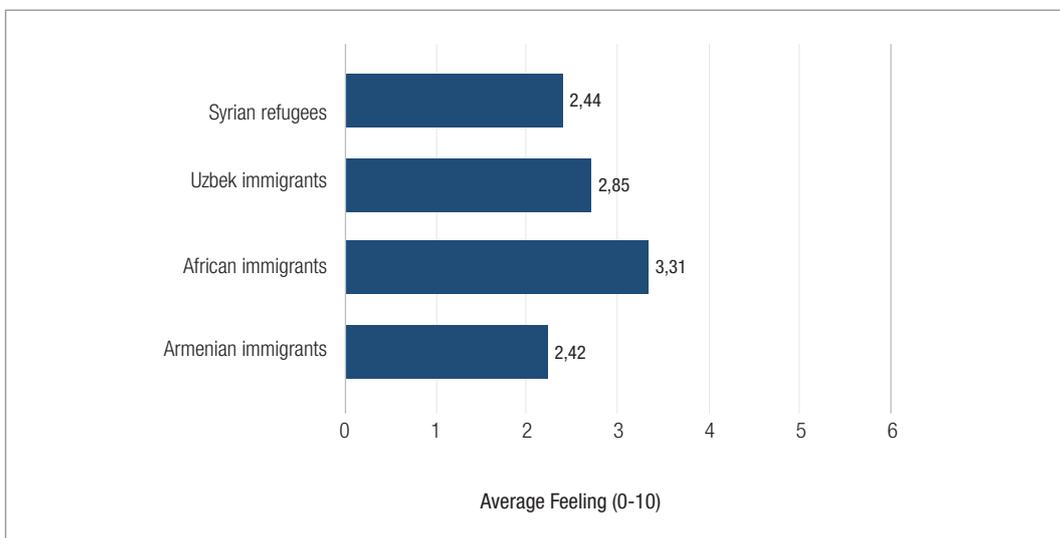


Figure 3.9 Average feelings toward international migrants

As with other issues, there are considerable differences between partisans with respect to their feelings about immigrants (Figure 3.10). HDP voters, who are predominantly Kurdish, stand out as the group with the warmest feelings toward international migrants. In contrast, MHP voters have very cold feelings toward every single immigrant group. While CHP, İYİ Parti, and HDP voters feel coldest toward Syrian refugees, the most distant group for AK Parti and MHP voters is Armenian immigrants.

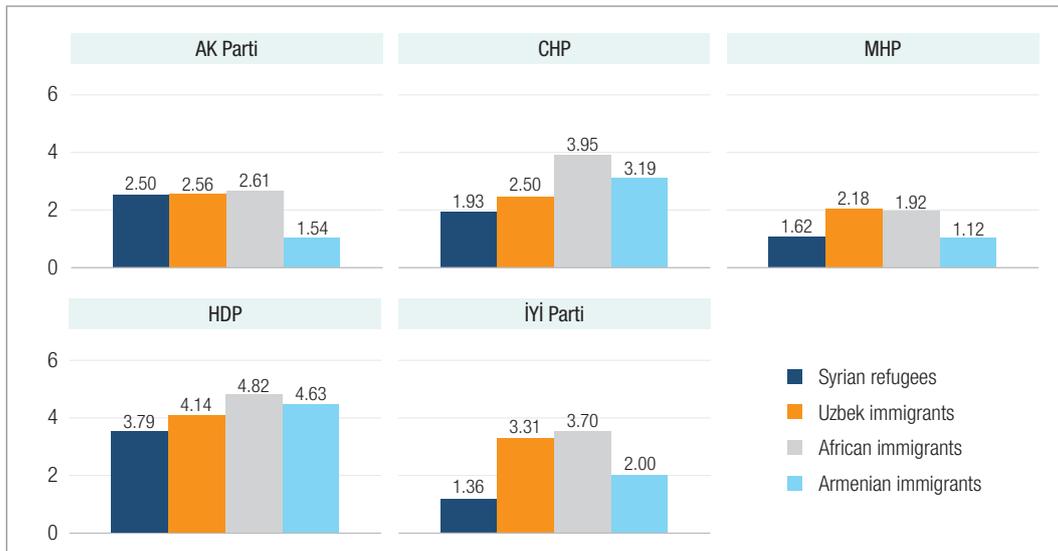


Figure 3.10 Average feelings toward international migrants according to party preference (0-10)

Qualitative Findings

Our survey results show that Istanbul residents hold negative feelings toward not only Syrian refugees but all immigrant groups in their city. Focus group discussions revealed a similar picture. For instance, in a focus group discussion with conservative women, the participants expressed complaints about immigration through an image depicting a sparsely populated Istanbul from earlier decades:

- *This photo [means] we miss the old Istanbul. That means tranquility. Everywhere has become crowded. Of course, we ourselves are already crowded but when we take in people from other countries, the buildings become even denser, and we're surrounded by more concrete [buildings]. This is why it's impossible for us now to take a photo like this. We'd be surrounded by a human crowd no matter where we're. To me, this means longing.*

- ...

- *[Moderator]: Are Syrians the sole cause of this overcrowding?*

- *I was just about to say that. There are also Arabs.*

- *There are Turcomans and Blacks.*

- *I am going to say something on this issue. The problem is that they can migrate to our country too easily. I mean, when people enter or exit [Turkey], we don't investigate every little detail like, say, Canada does. The real reason for the overcrowding is that we make immigration easy.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

In a different focus group, participants selected for their collage a visual including the text "Hello, beautiful homeland." When asked to comment on the image, they explained that "The beautiful homeland is no more." These participants likened the dense immigrant presence in Istanbul to an occupation:

- For those who have seen Fatih in particular, or Aksaray, you feel like a stranger there.
- We are like the United Nations now.
- Exactly. We're not objecting to the human dimension in all this, but what's been taking place is like an occupation. It's getting much bigger than state policy. That's why I feel we're invaded.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

The excerpt below clearly shows that Istanbulites' negative feelings are directed not only to Syrians but also to other immigrant groups:

I have two daughters who are both nine years old. There are Syrians living on the ground floor of the building I live in. On the ground floor of the building next door, there are Kazaks and Uzbeks. Their neighbors across the door are Afghans. I live in such an international district that when I leave home in the morning, there is only the corner grocery store to whom I can say good morning!

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 21 November 2019).

In a similar vein, threat perceptions are not exclusively associated with Syrians but with international migrants more broadly:

Since they arrived, unemployment has become even higher. Our own citizens can no longer find work easily. They're employed for lower wages and without insurance. This could be Syrians, or people from other countries. For example, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan... You look at this and see how many foreigners are in Turkey. There are at least 7-8 million foreigners. It's because they're here that our own citizens can't easily find jobs and work. This is a great problem for us.

(Focus group with conservative Kurdish men, 20 November 2019).

On the other hand, there were also participants who underscored the negative aspects of Syrians to distinguish them from other immigrant groups in terms of their "level of civilization":

- For example, Uzbeks also came. There are Uzbeks among them. But they aren't like that. They aren't like Syrians. They have better integrated with us. They're more civilized people.
- They [Syrians] have no interest in changing their ways. They're so comfortable. ... Here, they have everything. They're way too comfortable.
- There are Blacks, those who sell watches. Do you ever hear us complain about them?
- ...
- To be honest, the Arabs, Turcomans, Uzbeks, I don't want any of them. This is how it's in Kağıthane.
- Me, too, I don't want any of them.
- My brother lives in Kağıthane. When you're on the street, you see two of them approaching from one side, and three others approaching from the other side. They all know one another when I don't even know my next-door neighbor. How is it that they know one another? How is it that they meet and mingle?

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

- *[Syrians] are much greater in number than those with slanted eyes. More than the Japanese, the Uzbeks, the Koreans, the Mongolians. They [Syrians] breed a lot. Those [groups] other than the Syrians are, how should I say, cleaner. They don't [disturb] us.*
- *They're more cultured compared to Syrians.*
- *They're more well-behaved. They know how to wait in a line. In the grocery store, they wait for their turn. Syrians don't do that, [they] push you to get in front.*
- *There is always something devilish about them. We have been living with Blacks for so many years, but we haven't once heard them harass one of our daughters.*
- *I have Black tenants who rent my apartment and I'm very pleased with them. They don't cause any problems. In the building, too, they don't get into trouble with any of the other tenants.*

(Focus group with Alevi women, 12 November 2019)

We have also observed comments that distinguished Syrians from other immigrant groups in terms of their work-ethic, blaming Syrians for being deficient in commercial ethics and prone to begging:

- *Besides this race [the Syrians], we have Kazaks, Uzbeks, and Afghans; we have so many [foreigners]. Our friend mentioned the zenci [Blacks]; I use the same word, I also call them zenci. But I haven't once seen one of them who begs. I only see them selling watches or working. They wear their fashionable sport shoes, their best sportswear, and they engage in everyday commerce.*
- *And they exercise a lot, they're very good at that.*
- *I mean, they don't sell prayer beads for 5 liras. They sell them at their market price. The Syrians, that race, when they sell something, they check to see who's around. [They] don't sell stuff as a reasonable form of commerce. He wants you to pay him 1 lira for a 1 lira worth of item but expects you to not take the product. That is, he uses it as a cover for begging. Syrians are only nominally engaged in commerce. The other races are not like them.*

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 21 November 2019).

3.1.5 Social Distance from Syrian Refugees

Only 27.10 percent stated they would not have any issues with Syrian families moving in their neighborhood

The social distance scale, which was first developed by the American sociologist Emory S. Bogardus in 1924, is one of the most commonly used instruments in the analysis of intergroup prejudices and enmities.⁴¹ The social distance scale aims to identify the degree to which respondents are open to establishing social relationships with certain groups of individuals. Following the same logic, we asked our participants

whether they would be comfortable with Syrian families moving to their neighborhood and with having a Syrian refugee as their neighbor. We also asked our respondents to indicate whether they would be open to making friends with a Syrian refugee. Our findings show that Istanbulites are not willing to develop social relations with Syrians. Only 27.10 percent stated they would not have any issues with Syrian families moving in their neighborhood (Figure 3.11). The percentage of those who said they are open to having a Syrian refugee family living in the

same building with them and those who would accept a Syrian refugee as a friend were only 26.09 percent (Figure 3.12) and 25.48 percent (Figure 3.13), respectively.

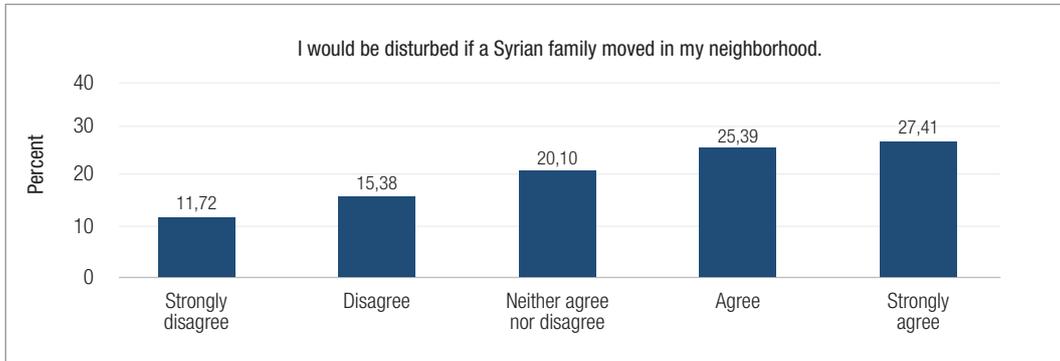


Figure 3.11 Social distance from Syrians: Living in the same neighborhood

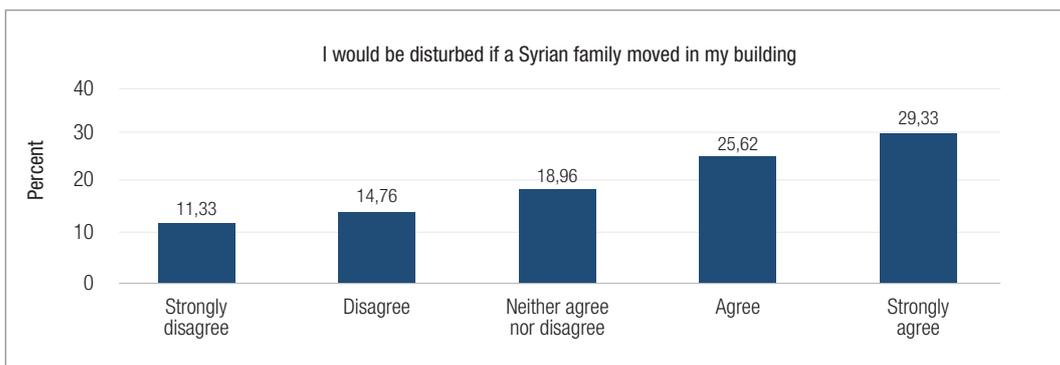


Figure 3.12 Social distance from Syrians: Living in the same building

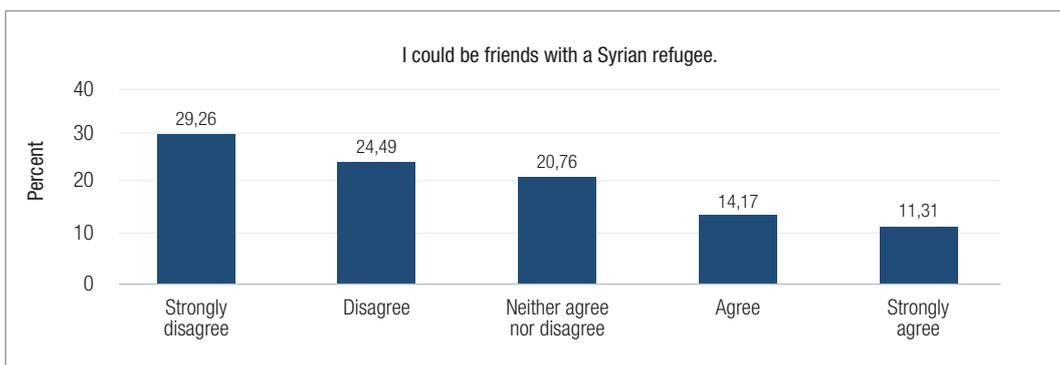


Figure 3.13 Social distance from Syrians: Friendship

To measure the relationship between party preference and social distance from Syrians, we created a simple social distance scale by taking the average of the responses to these three questions. The scale, which ranges from 1 (“Smallest social distance”) to 5 (“Largest social distance”), has an internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) coefficient of 0.92. Considering the average score of different party voters on the scale, it is HDP supporters who are most open to

establishing social relations with Syrians, whereas CHP and İYİ Parti supporters have the greatest social distance from Syrian refugees (Figure 3.14).

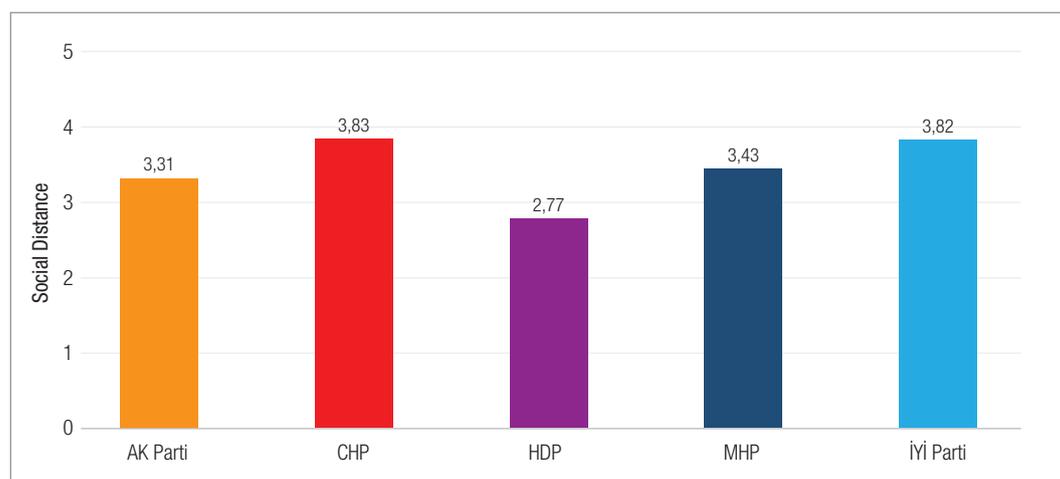


Figure 3.14 Party preference and social distance toward Syrians

Qualitative Findings

As we observed in the introduction, Syrian refugees are unequally distributed across the districts and neighborhoods in Istanbul. The vast majority of refugees reside in neighborhoods where rents are relatively cheaper and life standards are lower. In our focus group meetings, some participants who come from such areas protested this unequal distribution, complaining that the “burden” of the refugee crisis fall disproportionately on their shoulders:

- *Tarabya, or let's say Etiler... They [Syrians] can't take shelter in those places because these are expensive districts. They live in particular types of districts.*
- *Not all refugees are the same. There are those who are completely torn apart. Some are relatively wealthier. The wealthy ones have stayed more in shape.*
- *Not all districts in Istanbul are equally impacted by this. [Conditions] change according to district.*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

In our in-depth interviews with participants selected from focus group meetings, our interviewees shared some interesting views and experiences regarding their spatial encounters with Syrians. As refugees are unequally distributed across Istanbul, it was remarkable that our interviewees explained their positive or negative feelings about different districts through references to Syrians in particular and foreign migrants in general.

Many participants who currently reside in districts with large refugee concentrations such as Esenler, Güngören, Zeytinburnu, Kağıthane, and Sultangazi indicated their desire to live in districts without dense refugee populations. Those who said they are or would be satisfied with living in refugee-dense districts pointed at gated communities as their preferred place of residence. Participants' stories or dreams about moving are illuminating in this respect. For in-

stance, one of our interviewees rented out his property in Bağcılar due to the increasing Syrian population and rented an apartment in Üsküdar. He explained his decision in the following way:

Bağcılar, Esenler, Güngören, Zeytinburnu, Bahçelievler... These districts have more immigrants, Syrians in particular. Today, when you go to Zeytinburnu, it's all Pakistanis, Afghans... You go to Güngören and it's the same picture. You go to Esenler, there are so many Syrians. You go up to Bağcılar, there are so many Syrians again. When I go to a park, I feel like a stranger. That was the degree to which we felt like a stranger there. But here, in this part [of the city], it's a bit more comfortable.

(In-depth interview, conservative man in the upper-middle income group, 16 December 2019).

The same interviewee told us that if he had the means, he would prefer living in the Beşiktaş or Beykoz districts: "Beykoz is greener, it's forested. As someone from the Black Sea region, I like green spaces and forests. It's closer to the sea. People are more elite."

An interviewee, who similarly moved from Kağıthane to Fatih, complained about the density of immigrants in his former neighborhood and related this to issues concerning his children's education:

There are two schools my kids could go to. How should I say? I don't like classifying humans into groups, but there is the group we call Romans, and there are Turcomans, and also those from Syria. Turcomans are a whole different type, they're nothing like the Syrians. For example, their hair is different, dyed with henna. People from diverse groups, they don't educate their children well. With them, schools have become a bit mixed. There is nothing wrong with [children] going to school together or being together but the genetics of our schools have been corrupted a bit.

(In-depth interview, conservative man in the upper-middle income group, 30 November 2019).

This interviewee had no alternative but to send his kids to a public school. When asked about where he would rather live, he pointed to a specific neighborhood in Kağıthane that "has nicer schools" and "gated and luxury residences":

There is a neighborhood there and it has a school. But that area is peaceful and elite. It's a place with two-story buildings, or duplex or triplex stand-alone houses that are like private estates. More recently, there is an urban transformation process also going on there, but still, if there is one place where everyone in Kağıthane wants to reside, where everyone wishes they owned a house, that's the place, that's the common ground for everyone.

(In-depth interview, conservative man in the upper-middle income group, 30 November 2019).

Another interviewee, who resides in Şişli, said she was pleased with living in a central area but did not see this place as suitable for raising kids because of the immigrant population. When asked where she would want to live, she pointed to the Göztepe district, where "there are no Syrians":

[Şişli] is a very central district, I'm pleased with it in this respect. But not as a place for raising kids. Because it's too mixed. In our neighborhood there are many Blacks. There are a lot of Syrians. There are Afghans. Especially Uzbeks, they are everywhere. You can see an Uzbek everywhere [you look]. On the weekends, I go to Göztepe [to visit my brother], and there are none of them [immigrants] over there.

(In-depth interview, Alevi woman, 22 November 2019).

Another interviewee, who used to live in a rental apartment in the Sultangazi district but later moved to a property he bought in Seyrantepe, compared these two districts by referencing Syrian immigrants:

[Sultangazi] is a place that receives a lot of immigration, where there are many refugees. The Sultangazi district currently has a population of 505,000. This excludes the immigrants and refugees. ... When I go to Sultangazi, I really feel like I'm in Syria. ... I don't see the same thing in Seyrantepe, I seldom come across [immigrants]. Neither Syrians nor Pakistanis, I seldom encounter them.

(In-depth interview, conservative Kurdish man, 9 December 2019).

3.2 OPINIONS AND PREFERENCES REGARDING REFUGEE POLICIES

3.2.1 Admission of Syrian Refugees to Turkey

Anti-regime demonstrations that began in Syria in March 2011 quickly developed into an armed conflict between the regime forces and the opposition, evolving into a multilateral civil war by mid-2012. In response, Ankara declared an 'open door' policy for Syrians forced to leave their homes due to war and promised not to repatriate those who took refuge in Turkey, including those who entered the country illegally.⁴² Despite occasional interruptions, this open door policy continued until early 2016.⁴³ In this time period, Turkey gave temporary protection status to more than 2.5 million refugees. While the flow of refugees from Syria to Turkey slowed after 2016 with the implementation of stricter border policies, the number of individuals in Turkey under temporary protection status continued to increase. By early 2018, the number of refugees exceeded 3.5 million.⁴⁴

Despite the international praise for Ankara's open door policy in the early years of the Syrian civil war, the policy was subject of heated debates in the Turkish public sphere. The open door policy was frequently criticized in our focus group discussions as well. Thus in our survey, we asked the respondents whether they agreed with the following statement: "We did the right

Those who approved the open door policy were a minority even among AK Parti supporters.

thing by admitting Syrians who fled war and took refuge in our country." Our data shows that only 35.49 percent agreed (Figure 3.15). When we compare voters of different political parties, we see AK Parti, MHP, and HDP voters showing higher degrees of agreement than CHP and İYİ Parti voters. (Figure 3.16). That said, those who approved the open door policy were a minority even among AK Parti supporters.

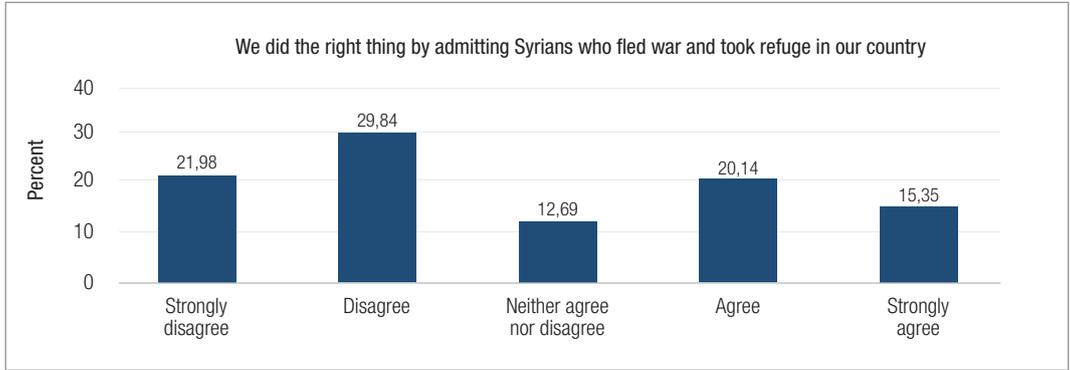


Figure 3.15 Views on the admission of Syrian refugees to Turkey

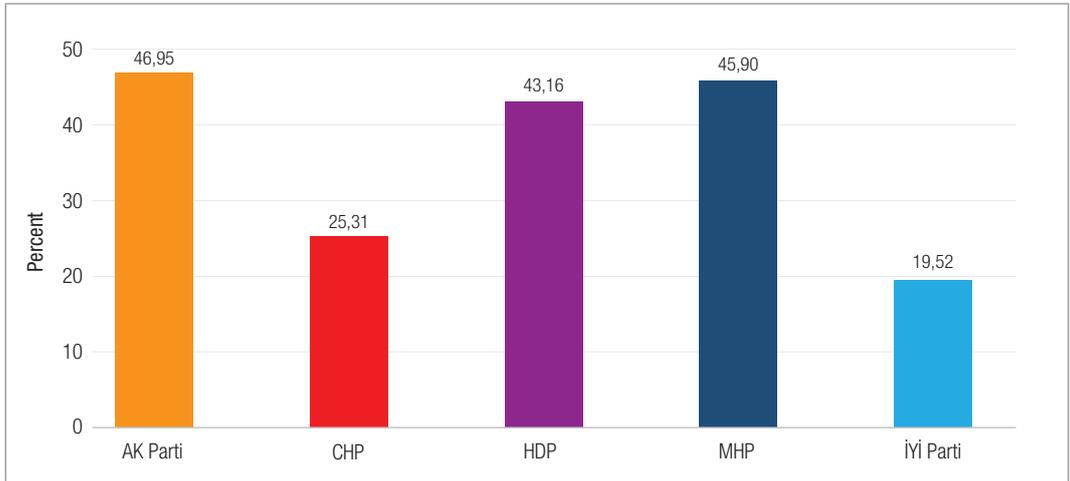


Figure 3.16 Percentage of party voters who support the admission of Syrians

Qualitative Findings

In our focus groups interviews with Istanbul residents, those who supported Ankara's open door policy were usually conservative participants:

In the geography of Islam, we, as Turkey, are a mother or a father. Those in Palestine, in Syria, in Yemen, in Libya, in Lebanon, at the end of the day, they will all come seeking their father or mother. This is no different than how even when we are 40 years old and have three kids ourselves, we always take our mothers' or fathers' ideas when we face certain difficulties. We take shelter in them. When it's necessary, when we're in economic need, we ask for our father's support. Sometimes, we move out of our own apartment and move in with our parents for a certain period. After all, they're always a force that backs us. I think Turkey should similarly own up to these countries like a father or with the affection of a mother, take care of them, feed them, and govern them.

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 14 November 2019).

- For one thing, our brothers over there, they're Muslim by faith. Of course, we can't simply exclude them.

- [Moderator]: So, you agree with Mr. ...

- Yes, I do. Because this was the case in the Ottoman system. They came and joined us in the Dardanelles War. Palestinians, Pakistanis, Afghans... When you visit Çanakkale, when you visit the martyrs' memorial there, you see people from all groups. That day will come, the Muslims will become one.

(Focus group with conservative Kurdish men, 21 November 2019).

But the open door policy was frequently criticized by conservative participants, too, and sometimes even completely rejected:

- I mean, I won't accept the guise of religion. Because we aren't the only Muslims. There is also Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia shut its doors.

- ...

- Yes, we aren't the only Muslim country. I say to myself, "Are we the only fool out there?"

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 19 November 2019).

In their criticism of the open door policy, participants often emphasized that the process was poorly managed. The scattering of Syrian refugees from border-zone camps across the entire country and their subsequent concentration in big cities were viewed as the result of poor governance:

In their criticism of the open door policy, participants often emphasized that the process was poorly managed.

- For instance, Turgut Özal also admitted immigrants from Bulgaria when they were deported. But he had to do that, and he took in our citizens. But when he did [admit the immigrants], he identified certain regions. When the immigrants were settled in those regions, they were admitted in an orderly way.

- ...

- This might have to do with the numbers.

- [It could have been] more planned, more...

- 3.5 million people came only from Syria.

- Then, [the government] shouldn't have let [them] in Istanbul, or in Ankara. In Istanbul and Ankara, [our own population] is already excessive.

- My friend, there is no checkpoint at the border; no customs or anything.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 14 November 2019).

- There is an International Law of Refugees. This applies in all countries. I mean in the countries that are properly governed. There is a law and it requires you to take in refugees. An earthquake happens, or war breaks out, or a natural catastrophe takes place. You take them in, but you also employ them. I, too, had many relatives who applied to become refugees in Germany. I have close ones [who have been in that situation]. But when they land in the airport, the police directly take them to a camp zone. I've been

to those camp spaces, I saw them. You know what they look like? Walls, wired fences, security, soldiers... You wouldn't be able to get in or out even if you were armed with rifles and tanks.

- That's true. In our case, there isn't one refugee that lives in a camp.
- But those places [in Europe] have a barber inside, a hospital inside. It has a school inside. [The state] first integrates you there; medically examines you. You're obliged to learn the German language; you're obliged to attend a language class every morning in the camp. You must learn that country's anthem, their anthem of independence. You must learn its history, at least a little bit, know who's been there, what took place. And then you take a test and if [the refugee] is domesticated, I mean, if [the refugee] is seen as integrated, [the refugee] will only then receive a 5-to-6 year residence permit. [The state] tells you, "I'll give you temporary residence." Is this how things work in our country? The man [the refugee] takes his hookah, he's [vacationing] in Antalya. From Antalya he takes his hookah with him and then travels to Izmir with ease. How can this be possible!

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 7 November 2019).

- After all, these people came to this country, but I think to myself, maybe they could at least be proportionally distributed to various localities instead of being lumped in a single city. I wish there were the option of such an allocation.

- We could have kept them in a certain region of the country and not let them live all across Turkey.

- I agree. They could have been restricted to a single area. They could also be given a deadline and then be sent back after the war ended.

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 11 November 2019).

We opened our door and they entered, [but] why did they spread all over [the country]? A separate place could have been built for them, a city of prefabricated houses for immigrants. Why did they mix us with everyone?

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

3.2.2 Place of Residence for Syrian Refugees

The future of Syrian refugees in Turkey is as much a subject of debate as their admission. Existing studies show that Syrians are becoming more likely to remain and settle in Turkey.⁴⁵ Despite this tendency, politicians in both the government and the opposition continue making statements that see the refugees' return to Syria as the solution to the refugee crisis. This issue came up in our focus group discussions, which we conducted shortly after the Operation Peace Spring [translator's note: Turkey's military offensive into northeastern Syria in 2019]. Our participants voiced various opinions on this matter, including resettling Syrians in a safe zone inside the borders of Syria, hosting Syrians in refugee camps inside Turkey, resettling them in sparsely populated areas across Turkey, and immediately deporting them. To understand the degree to which Istanbul residents support these proposals, we asked the following question to our survey respondents: "Given that the armed conflict in Syria has not

The most popular answer was "They should be resettled in safe zones that will be created inside Syrian borders" (25.54 percent), followed by "They should be resettled in refugee camps that will be established in Turkey" (22.88 percent).

ceased, where do you think is the most appropriate place of residence for Syrian refugees currently in Turkey?”⁴⁶ The most popular answer was “They should be resettled in safe zones that will be created inside Syrian borders” (25.54 percent), followed by “They should be resettled in refugee camps that will be established in Turkey” (22.88 percent). Roughly 18 percent said, “They should be free to choose their own place of residence” and about 20 percent said, “They should be deported without regard to their safety,” which are noteworthy results (Figure 3.17).

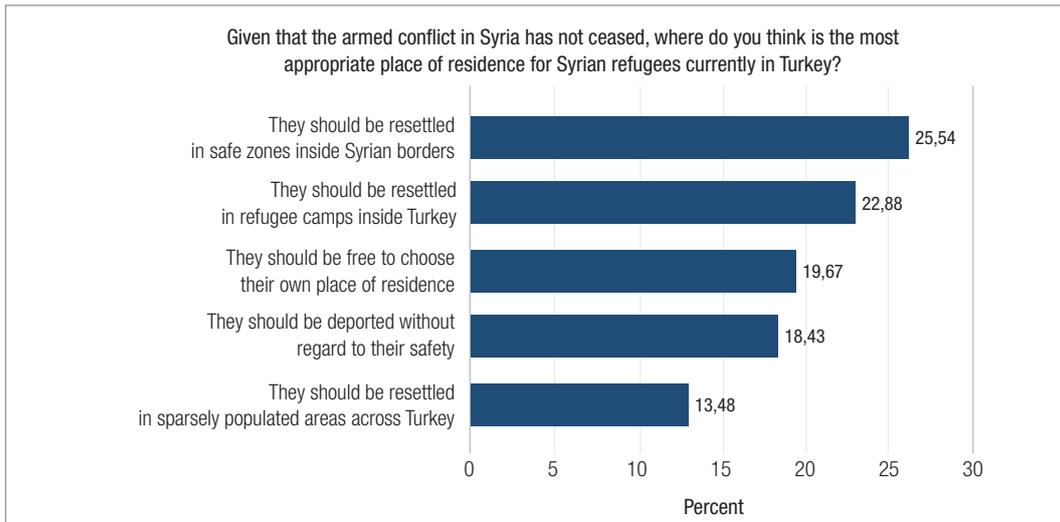


Figure 3.17 Opinions on where Syrian refugees should live

Another striking finding is that those who support freedom of movement for Syrian refugees are a minority even among respondents who approve the open door policy (Figure 3.18). When we analyze the responses by party preference, İYİ Parti voters appear to have the harshest attitudes: Nearly 63 percent of them think that Syrian refugees should be deported without regard to their safety (Table 3.2).

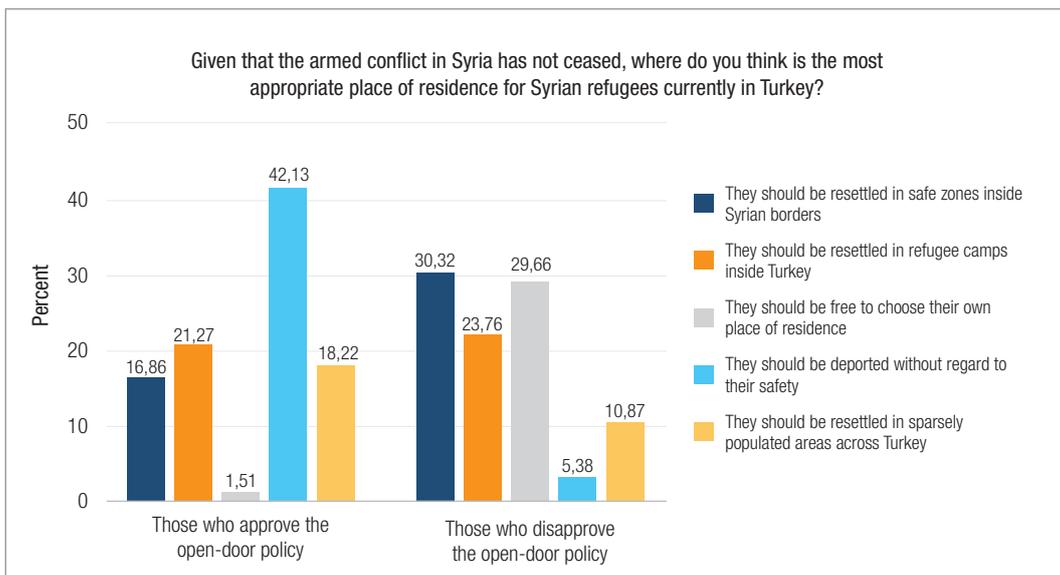


Figure 3.18 Opinions on the Open Door Policy and Support for Syrians’ Freedom of Movement

Table 3.2 Opinions on where refugees should live according to party preference (%)

	AK Parti	CHP	HDP	MHP	İYİ Parti
Refugees should be resettled in safe zones that will be created inside Syrian borders	25.94	27.33	18.82	29.62	12.21
Refugees should be resettled in refugee camps that will be established in Turkey	22.95	15.33	40.32	33.98	11.41
Refugees should be deported without regard to their safety	9.84	28.73	5.42	20.52	62.86
Refugees should be free to choose their own place of residence	27.38	14.73	18.12	6.94	3.97
Refugees should be relocated to sparsely populated areas across Turkey	13.89	13.89	17.31	8.93	9.56

Qualitative Findings

The majority of our focus group participants supported the relocation of refugees in a safe zone that will be created inside Syrian borders. However, our interviewees were also aware of the likelihood that most Syrians who have settled in Turkey would not be willing to migrate again. Some participants advocated the use of coercion, if necessary:

- *No doubt. They should be resettled.*
- *Yes, that should be the case.*
- *I think so, too.*
- *[Moderator]: So, you say they should be relocated against their will?*
- *No doubt about it. They should be.*
- *What do you mean [to the moderator]? They should have a say in this?*

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

Besides the creation of a safe zone, another option our focus group participants advocated for refugees was a life outside the big cities. Some participants suggested that Syrian refugees should be resettled in sparsely populated cities or in rural areas where they can engage in agriculture and animal husbandry. They argued that this would prevent the refugees from causing problems in the cities as a source of cheap labor and turn them into a useful resource for the nation's economy:

Some participants suggested that Syrian refugees should be resettled in sparsely populated cities or in rural areas where they can engage in agriculture and animal husbandry.

I agree with others. Inshallah, the Operation Peace Spring will end in victory and our Syrian siblings will then return to their country. It's only natural that everyone wants to live in peace in their homeland, their own land. I believe most, the majority will return. For those who will stay... I believe agriculture and animal husbandry has declined in our country. If this is possible, the Syrian families should be directed to agricultural lands and told to cultivate this or that. Or [they should be] told to raise these or those animals. I'd want them to play a role in the revitalization of agriculture and animal husbandry in our country.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 14 November 2019).

My personal opinion is this: After all, Turkey receives aid from the European Union for Syrian refugees and at some point, Turkey should resettle Syrians in certain spots, in rural areas near the Syrian-Turkish border.

(Focus group with conservative women in the upper-middle income group, 18 November 2019).

[The authorities] should resettle them in the Anatolian countryside. Let them plant and sow. They'll benefit and we, too, will benefit. We'll give them our land and they'll give us their labor.

(Focus group with secular Turkish women, 12 November 2019).

3.2.3 Social Services and Assistance for Syrian Refugees

Under the temporary protection regime in Turkey, Syrians can benefit from a variety of social services such as education, health, Turkish language courses, occupational training, and psychosocial assistance. Moreover, there exist a series of in-kind and cash assistance programs for Syrians, which are mostly financed by international organizations.⁴⁷ In addition to these programs, some municipalities and civil society organizations also run assistance programs to meet the needs of refugees.

These social assistance programs play an important role in meeting the basic needs of Syrians, most of whom live in difficult conditions, and facilitating their social integration. However, the dissemination of false information about these programs have made them a subject of debate, with some even pointing to them as “evidence” that the Syrians are preferentially treated compared with the native-born population. Based on these debates, we asked our participants to grade the following four social policies on a scale of 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”):

- Syrian refugees should be supported in learning Turkish.
- Refugee children should be able to receive adequate levels of education.
- Necessary work should be done for Syrian refugees to benefit from general health screening and vaccination services.⁴⁸
- Syrian families who are verifiably in-need should receive social assistance.

Our findings show that Istanbul residents are relatively tolerant of the social services and assistance provided to Syrians. As can be seen in Figure 3.19, those who “agree” or “strongly agree” outnumber those who “disagree” or “strongly disagree” on all of the four social policies.

Our findings show that Istanbul residents are relatively tolerant of the social services and assistance provided to Syrians.

Even for social assistance, the most controversial issue, those who unequivocally oppose the policy are below 40 percent. However, support for each of the four policies is lower than average among CHP and İYİ Parti voters (Figure 3.20).

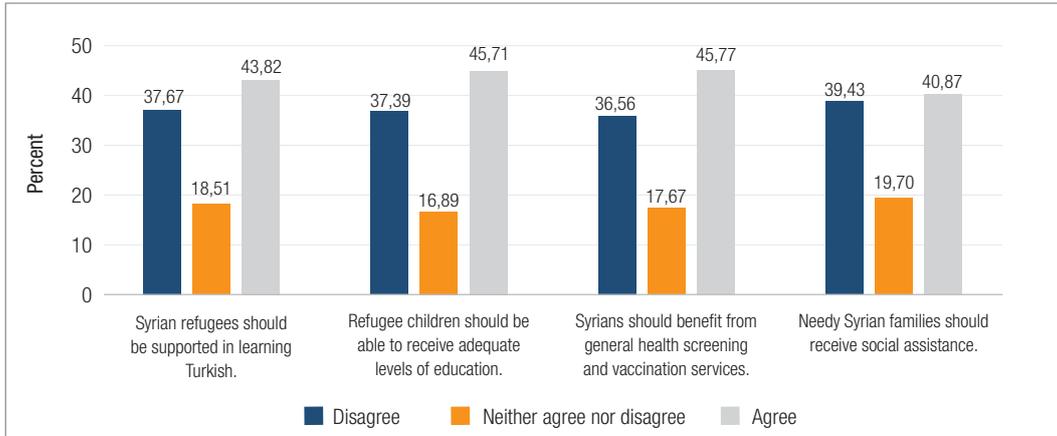


Figure 3.19 Support for social programs targeting Syrians

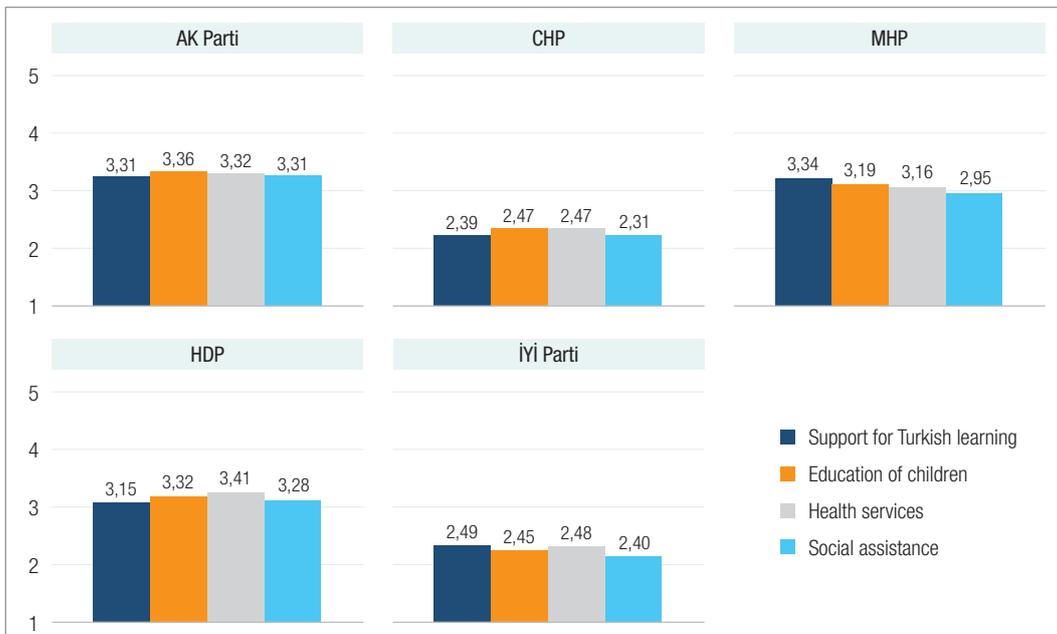


Figure 3.20 Party preference and support for social programs targeting refugees (1-5)

Qualitative Findings

Our participants took relatively moderate positions vis-à-vis the social services provided to Syrian refugees. Many participants especially supported the education of refugee children and argued that measures toward this end are indispensable if Turkey is to have a peaceful and prosperous future. Unsurprisingly, we observed that these views were expressed more by participants who had come to terms with the idea of refugees becoming permanent residents in Turkey. There were also participants who maintained that Syrian youth could make valuable contributions to Turkey in sports, arts, science, and economics if they receive the necessary education:

Many participants especially supported the education of refugee children and argued that measures toward this end are indispensable if Turkey is to have a peaceful and prosperous future.

- *We admitted them, and they came here. Now we must raise these children. We must educate them here.*

- *[Moderator]: These [children in the pictures] represent Syrian children, don't they?*

- *They also need to live. They also need to be educated. And if they'll leave in the future, they must be educated before they leave. It's unlikely they'll leave. I think it's going to take a long time. I don't think they'll be willing to change the settled life that they've set up after so many years.*

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 14 November 2019).

Among them there are those who really deserve sympathy and pity. If we're to take care of these people here, if they're to stay here, we should educate them instead of giving them money. Because the children who grow up here will likely remain here. It's very difficult for us to send them away.

(Focus group with Alevi men, 15 November 2019).

I chose that image. It's about education. It's about educating both ourselves and them. If we're to come to terms with Syrians, it will all start with education.

(Focus group with secular Kurdish men, 18 November 2019).

- *I had friends in the Netherlands. You go there and it's all people from the Philippines and such. Take their contribution to the economy. Let's say they were initially treated harshly. But later, their children showed determination and ambition. And today, a company has a CEO who's from the Philippines. Another company has an Israeli, Iraqi, Iranian CEO... The Chinese were initially treated harshly in the United States. Now they have their own Chinatowns. It's them who control the streets and you can't ever touch them. If this is to happen, they [the Syrians] must be integrated, they need to be given good education. Frankly, I think that way.*

- *[Moderator]: I understand. [You say] that there is hope and opportunity.*

- *Here is a hopeful country. But at the same time, there is opportunism. As long as there is equality of opportunity, why wouldn't some of them be educated to become scientists? Why wouldn't we benefit from them? Maybe they'll make some discovery and that will benefit us. Turkey's name will be in the news, and they'll be referred to as Turkish citizens of Syrian origin. How do we refer to Mesut Özil? He is a Turkish citizen but a German footballer.*

- ...

- *What was that runner's name, the Azeri? Was it Guliyev? ... I think it was Guliyev. These kinds of people, they were subjected to a certain education or certain standards, and then represented us in various parts of the world wearing the Turkish uniform and also on national platforms until they had children of their own. If these people were positively raised, in good and positive ways, there is no reason why we wouldn't later hear things like, "A Turkish female scientist of Syrian origin achieved this or that in the United States."*

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

However, we must note that these relatively pro-refugee participants were not free of contradictions and tensions. We chose the following excerpt to illustrate these tensions:

As a country, we listened to our conscience and admitted in our country those who were fleeing war, but now, we're also desperate as to what we should do. They came to our country, but they don't speak the language. They can't really get the same opportunities at school. There are way too many kids who don't attend school. We see them at the traffic lights or elsewhere. Is it really us who should bear the burden of educating them on a par with ours? What will happen to us while we live with them? Should we shelter them among us or should we totally exclude them? We are living these contradictions.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 11 November 2019).

3.2.4 Work Permit and Conditional Citizenship

The temporary protection regime that Turkey implements for Syrian refugees gives the refugees the right to basic services such as health and education. However, as codified in the Regulation on the Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection (ratified on 15 January 2016), the participation of refugees in the workforce is conditional on a work permit to be obtained by the potential employer on their behalf. The said regulation also introduces employment quotas for foreigners under temporary protection, stipulating that the number of foreign workers in a workplace cannot exceed 10 percent of the Turkish citizens employed in the same workplace, except in some special cases.⁴⁹ These regulations pave the way for the exploitation of refugees in the informal sector as a low-cost labor force. Indeed, a report by the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Turkey Office, published in February 2020, estimated that 941,000 Syrians were employed in Turkey in 2017 and that 91.6 percent of them were in the informal sector.⁵⁰ This situation pits Syrian refugees against workers from the lowest strata of the local workforce and thus increases social tensions.⁵¹

A report by the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Turkey Office, published in February 2020, estimated that 941,000 Syrians were employed in Turkey in 2017 and that 91.6 percent of them were in the informal sector.

Another obstacle to the social integration of Syrian refugees is their legal status, which is built on the presumption of temporariness. As a result, the residence of Syrians in Turkey and the social rights they are afforded are devoid of strong legal assurances. In fact, Article 11 of the Temporary Protection Regulation, which went into force on 22 October 2014, states that temporary protection can be withdrawn for all refugees collectively with a presidential decree.⁵² Uncertainties caused by this legal situation confine refugees to a life of precarious conditions and make social integration difficult.⁵³ Meanwhile, a limited number of people have so far benefited from the citizenship opportunity provided by the state for highly educated and professional refugees.⁵⁴

With this background in mind, we asked our participants what they think about granting work permits and conditional citizenship to Syrian refugees. Results show that both policies have very low levels of support. Only 27.69 percent agree with the statement "Syrian refugees should be given work permits," while 56.27 percent disagree. In a similar vein, only 25.96 percent of the respondents agree with "extending citizenship to Syrians who have no criminal

record and have the skills to practice professions that are in demand in Turkey.” More than 60 percent oppose the measure (Figure 3.21). In summary, Istanbul residents tend to be against policies that move beyond the provision of social services and assistance and give refugees equal status and rights with locals.

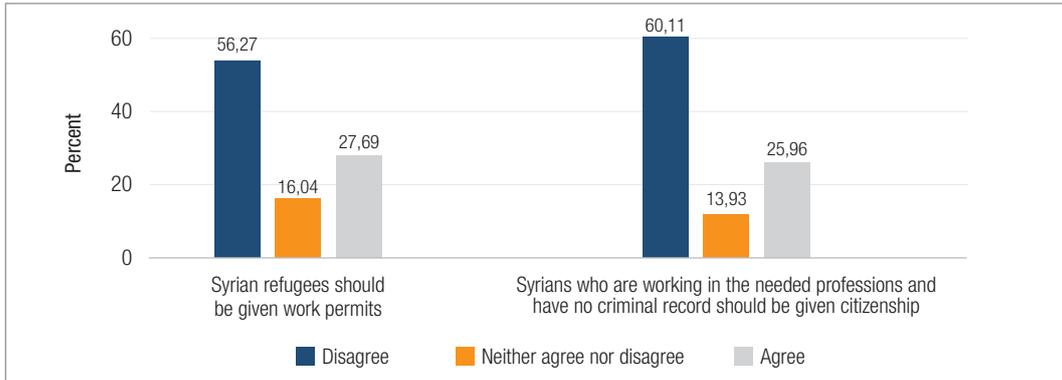


Figure 3.21 Support for work permits and conditional citizenship

When we break down opinions about conditional citizenship by party preference, we see that voters of the two nationalist parties, MHP and İYİ Parti, are the ones who most strongly oppose this policy (76.97 percent and 73 percent, respectively). Those with negative views of conditional citizenship make up 68 percent of CHP voters and are as high as 53 percent among AK Parti voters. HDP voters seem to have a more balanced distribution in their views on this subject (Figure 3.21).

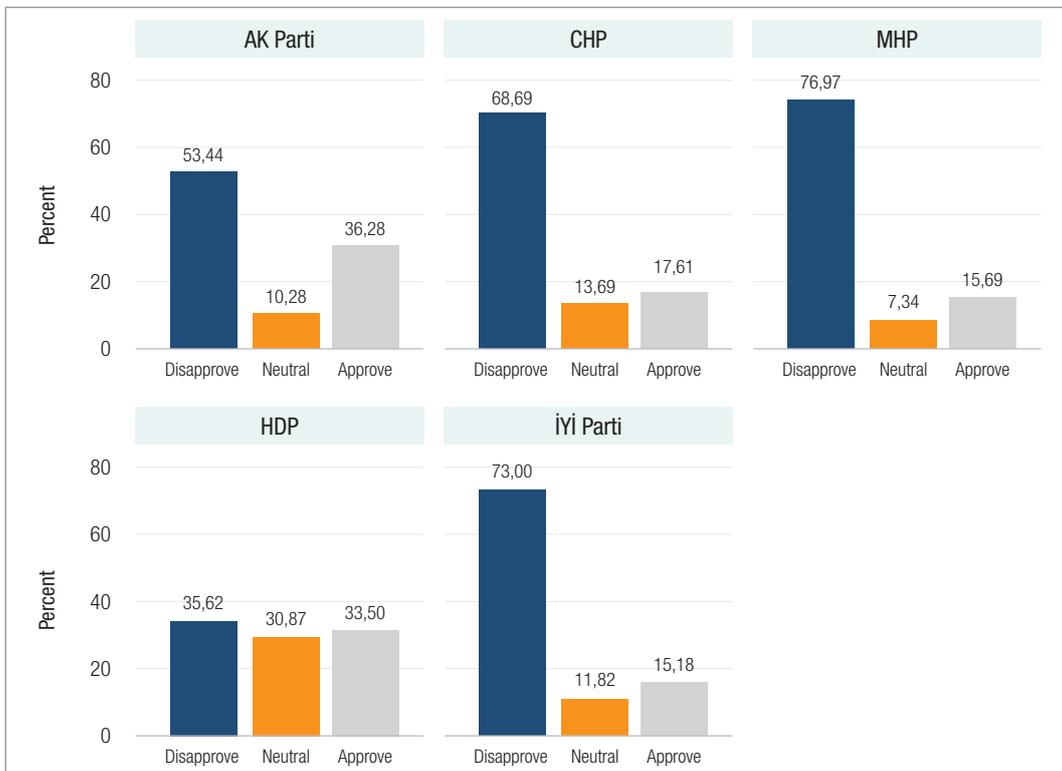


Figure 3.22 Approval Rates for Conditional Citizenship Policies by Party Preference

Qualitative Findings

The idea of giving citizenship to Syrian refugees was generally disapproved by our focus group participants. As we discussed earlier, objections on this subject are partly grounded in fears that the Syrians might vote in elections and upset the political balance. In addition, our participants claimed that Syrian refugees lack the skills to deserve Turkish citizenship and that the skilled among them were already “taken” by Western nations:

- There's something I heard. You know how Europe doesn't take all of them in? Europe takes in the educated ones. Turkey is like a gateway. The uneducated, those who will cause trouble, we're left with those ones.

- We don't look to see if they're thieves or rascals, we simply take them all.

(Focus group with conservative women in the lower-middle income group, 8 November 2019).

The most educated, the learned Syrians, those wealthy families who live near Damascus, or the wealthy families of Aleppo. When war broke out, all of them had already fled to Europe. And there is one more thing. The United States has also already taken in what they want to take in. A Syrian professor was advertised on CIA's own webpage. It announced: "Welcome to America and we thank in advance for the labor you will contribute." Excuse my language, but we, in the meanwhile, were left with the scum of the earth, the beggars, the usurers, the menial workers, the gypsies, the fiddlers and the idlers.

(Focus group with conservative men in the upper-middle income group, 12 November 2019).

Europe took the better ones. We were left with the blind and the crippled, those unfit for work.

(Focus group with conservative men in the lower-middle income group, 13 November 2019).

The skilled ones here make up maybe 1 percent, or maybe 2. The others have long gone to Europe. The doctors, the engineers, what have you, the technicians, or those with a craft. The garbage stayed here.

(Focus group with secular Turkish men, 14 November 2019).

- It's them that Europe wants anyway. Europe wants their qualified workers.

- It's because Europe has already grabbed the ones that we're failing to integrate here.

- We sometimes look down on them, but these men actually speak three or four languages. They speak English, for instance, whereas we don't. Actually, it isn't they who drag us down, it's the other way around. Those men speak four languages.

- Those ones have gone to Europe already.

(Focus group with secular Kurdish men, 18 November 2019).

4

FACTORS THAT SHAPE THE LOCALS' VIEWS ON SYRIANS

In Part 3, we showed that Istanbulites' perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrians differ significantly by party identity. Here, in Part 4, we examine in more detail the factors that shape natives' views on refugees. For this purpose, we focus on two of the perceptions and attitudes we discussed in the previous section, which we think are particularly important: average feelings for Syrians and support for conditional citizenship. We find the former meaningful because it indicates natives' emotional distance from Syrians. The latter, on the other hand, provides a valuable angle for understanding the extent to which the public supports the principle of legal equality, which is essential for the integration of refugees.

We addressed the factors that have an effect on these two variables under seven headings: (1) demographic variables, (2) political discourses, (3) nationalism and xenophobia, (4) lifestyle concerns, (5) economic concerns, (6) concerns about security, and (7) intergroup contact.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Western-centered studies examining public attitudes toward immigrants have found that negative attitudes are more prevalent among people with lower levels of education and those living in socioeconomically insecure conditions. It has also been shown that men and older individuals are more likely to embrace anti-immigrant ideas compared with women and younger individuals, although there are also studies that suggest the contrary.⁵⁵ To understand whether a similar pattern applies to Turkey, we examined Istanbul residents' feelings and attitudes toward Syrian refugees by gender, age, level of education, and monthly household income. Figure 4.1 presents the distribution of average feelings toward Syrians according to these variables. As the figure makes clear, there is no meaningful difference between the male participants' emotions toward refugees and those of the female participants. While age, level of education, and monthly household income reflect patterns similar to the findings in the existing literature, differentiation along these variables is limited. In short, we can argue that there is no significant link between these four basic demographic variables and emotional distance from Syrian refugees.

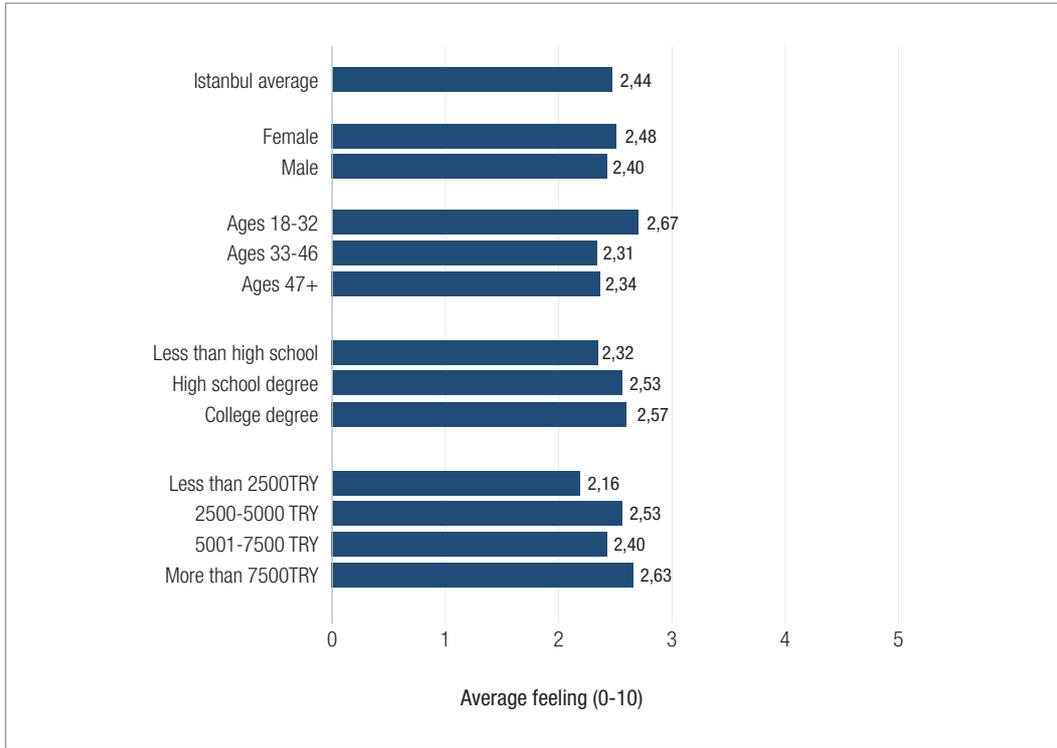


Figure 4.1 Basic Demographic Variables and Average Feeling toward Syrians

When we turn to our participants’ reactions to the possibility of extending citizenship to Syrians who “have no criminal record and have the skills to practice professions that are in demand in Turkey,” we see a relatively different picture. As Figure 4.2 shows, gender and age have no significant impact on support for conditional citizenship policy. However, college graduates and those in higher income groups show greater degrees of support for the policy when compared to relatively less educated and lower-income individuals. Among those with a monthly household income over TRY7,500, support for conditional citizenship is strikingly high, almost 41.64 percent. This rate is as low as 18.28 percent among those with a monthly household income lower than TRY2,500. Moreover, we observe an 8.5-point gap between college graduates and those who did not graduate from high school. In other words, although socio-economically better-off individuals do not necessarily hold positive feelings about Syrians, they seem to be more open to the idea of extending citizenship to refugees who satisfy certain criteria.

Among those with a monthly household income over TRY7,500, support for conditional citizenship is strikingly high, almost 41.64 percent. This rate is as low as 18.28 percent among those with a monthly household income lower than TRY2,500.

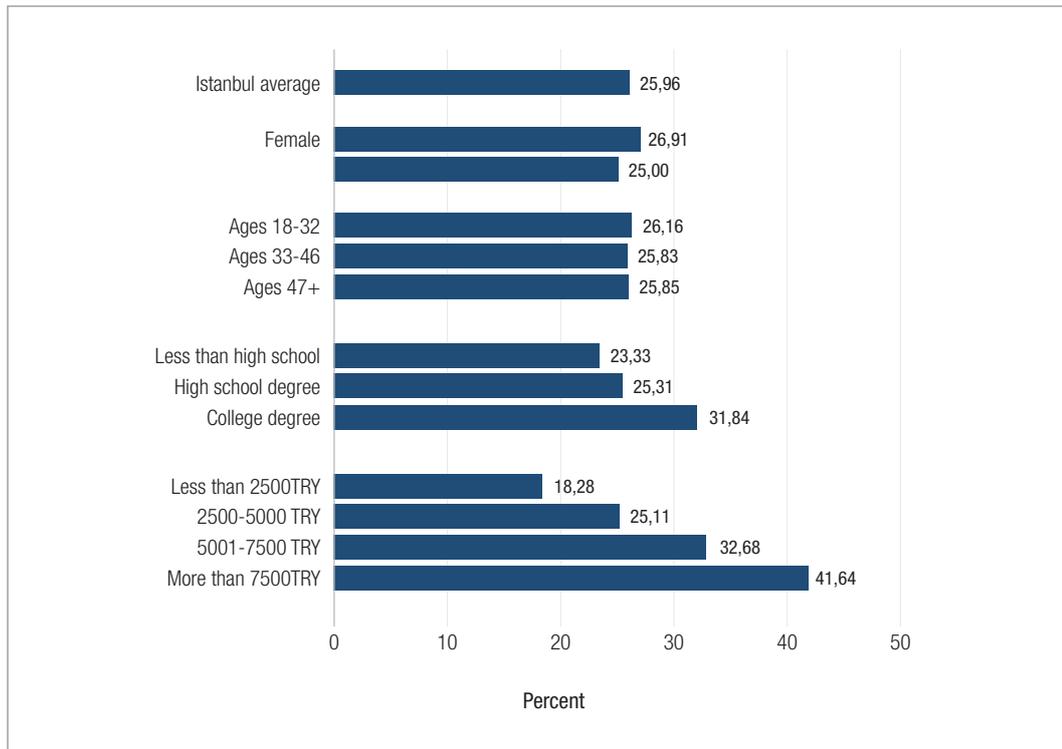


Figure 4.2 Basic demographic variables and support for conditional citizenship

The ethnic and religious identities of participants are the other demographic variables we examine in this study. The Western-centric academic literature generally focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of whites, who make up the ethnic majority. The few studies that explore minorities' feelings and opinions about newcomers have produced contradictory results. For instance, some studies in the United States have found that African-Americans tend to hold more liberal attitudes about immigration than do whites. This finding is explained by the empathy or cultural affinity that a minority social group feels about a newcomer group.⁵⁶ But there are also studies that show that African Americans, who have to compete with immigrants over jobs and economic resources, tend to display harsher attitudes toward newcomers.⁵⁷ A third approach emphasizes the role of local context in determining African-Americans' attitudes toward immigrants.⁵⁸

Similarly, studies on perceptions of and attitudes toward refugees in Turkey usually overlook the minorities. Indeed, most quantitative studies do not separately analyze the attitudes of Alevi and Kurdish citizens.

Similarly, studies on perceptions of and attitudes toward refugees in Turkey usually overlook the minorities. Indeed, most quantitative studies do not separately analyze the attitudes of Alevi and Kurdish citizens.⁵⁹ There are several reasons why both the Kurdish and Alevi citizens of Turkey might view refugees more negatively than the Sunni Turkish majority. For instance, the employment of many refugees as a cheap labor force in the manufacturing, construction, and service sectors create conditions where they compete with Kurdish workers who mi-

grated to big cities in recent times.⁶⁰ Alevi, on the other hand, may perceive Sunni Arab refugees as a cultural and religious threat.⁶¹ Nonetheless, one may also expect groups like the Alevi and Kurds, who have themselves been subjected to oppression, to be more sympathetic than the Sunni Turkish majority toward Syrian refugees.

Findings presented in Figure 4.3 seem to support the second of these hypotheses. We find that Kurdish/Zaza participants tend to have warmer feelings toward Syrians compared to Turkish participants. The same holds for the comparison between Alevi and Sunni participants, with the former showing warmer feelings. Moreover, as shown in Figure 4.4, support for conditional citizenship is higher among the Alevi and Kurds. Compared with the minorities, the Sunni Turkish majority displays a much more negative attitude toward refugees.

We find that Kurdish/Zaza participants tend to have warmer feelings toward Syrians compared to Turkish participants. The same holds for the comparison between Alevi and Sunni participants, with the former showing warmer feelings.

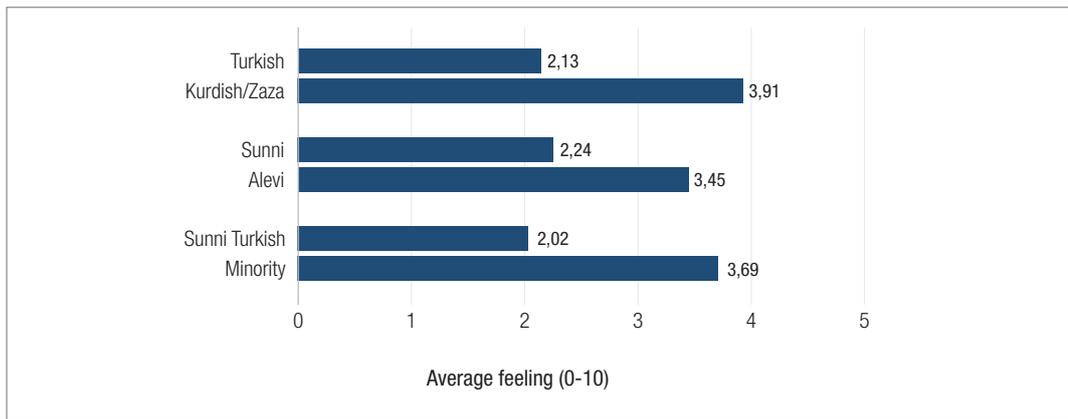


Figure 4.3 The relation between ethnic and religious identities and feelings about Syrians

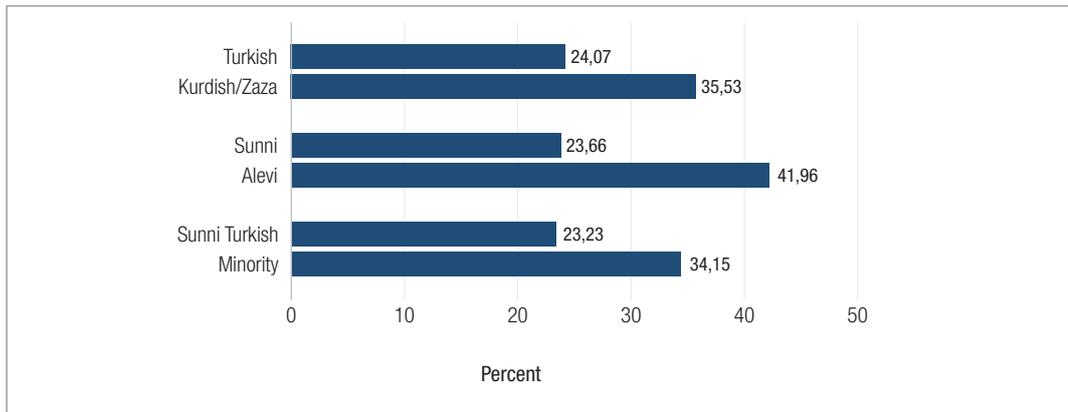


Figure 4.4 The relation between ethnic and religious identities and support for conditional citizenship

This should not cause us to overlook the fact that, on the whole, the feelings of ethnic and religious minorities about Syrians are also negative. In addition, as shown in Figure 4.5, it is toward

Syrian refugees that Kurdish and Alevi citizens have the coldest feelings among all other immigrant groups in Istanbul.

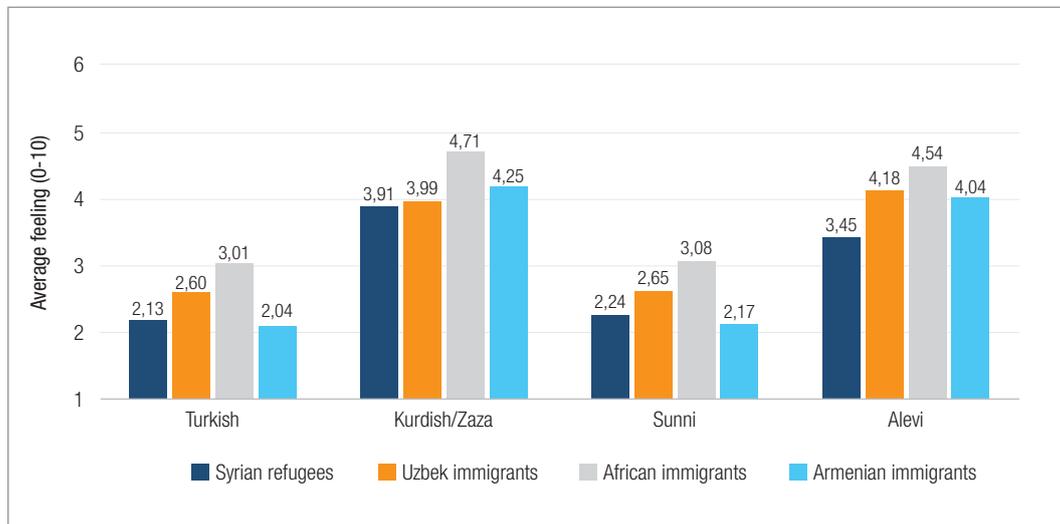


Figure 4.5 The relation between ethnic and religious identities and feelings about immigrants

4.2 POLITICAL DISCOURSES

In Part 3, we showed that political discourses marginalizing Syrians received high levels of public support, whereas the discourses circulated by AK Parti representatives to mitigate negative reactions against refugees were relatively less accepted. Moreover, we demonstrated how our participants can both marginalize Syrians and approve of discourses preaching solidarity with them at the same time. In this section, we examine whether the level of agreement with these mitigating discourses has any effect on citizens' feelings or policy preferences regarding Syrian refugees.

Our findings show a positive association between feelings about refugees and agreement with descriptions of Syrians as “brothers-in-religion,” “guests,” or “the oppressed”—descriptions that were until recently commonly used by government-affiliated circles.

Our findings show a positive association between feelings about refugees and agreement with descriptions of Syrians as “brothers-in-religion,” “guests,” or “the oppressed”—descriptions that were until recently commonly used by government-affiliated circles. For instance, among those who agreed with the statement “Syrian refugees are our brothers-in-religion,” the average feeling toward refugees is 3.54 out of 10, but that average is much lower, 1.01, among those who disagree with the same statement. Similarly, those who agree with the statement “Syrian refugees

are our guests” have an average feeling of 3.95, while those who disagree have an average of 0.79. In addition, there appears to be a strong link between agreement with exclusionary discourses and feelings about refugees. Those who agree with descriptions of refugees as an economic burden or as receiving preferential treatment compared to Turkish citizens hold much colder feelings about Syrians than do those who disagree with these statements (Figure 4.6).

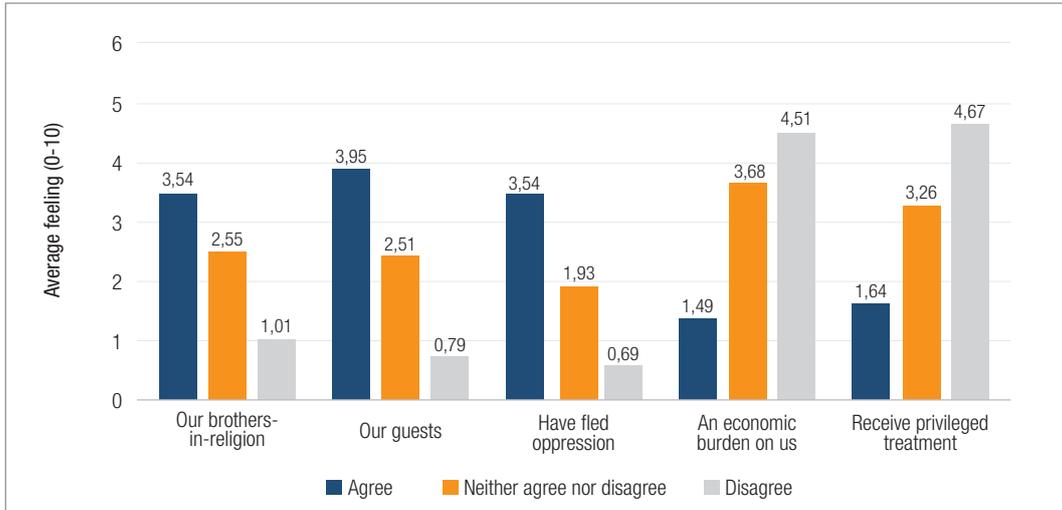


Figure 4.6 Levels of Agreement with Prominent Political Discourse about Syrians and Average Feelings

We see a comparable picture on the question of extending citizenship to refugees who satisfy certain criteria. While 40.74 percent of those who agree with the discourse of religious brotherhood support conditional citizenship, only 9.67 percent of those who disagree support the policy. There is a similarly strong relationship between agreement with discourses defining Syrians as “guests” or “the oppressed” and support for conditional citizenship policy. On the other hand, those who agree with exclusionary discourses about Syrian refugees tend to show strikingly lower levels of support for conditional citizenship. Between those who agree that Syrians are an economic burden on the local population and those who disagree, the difference in support for conditional citizenship is as high as 46 points (Figure 4.7).

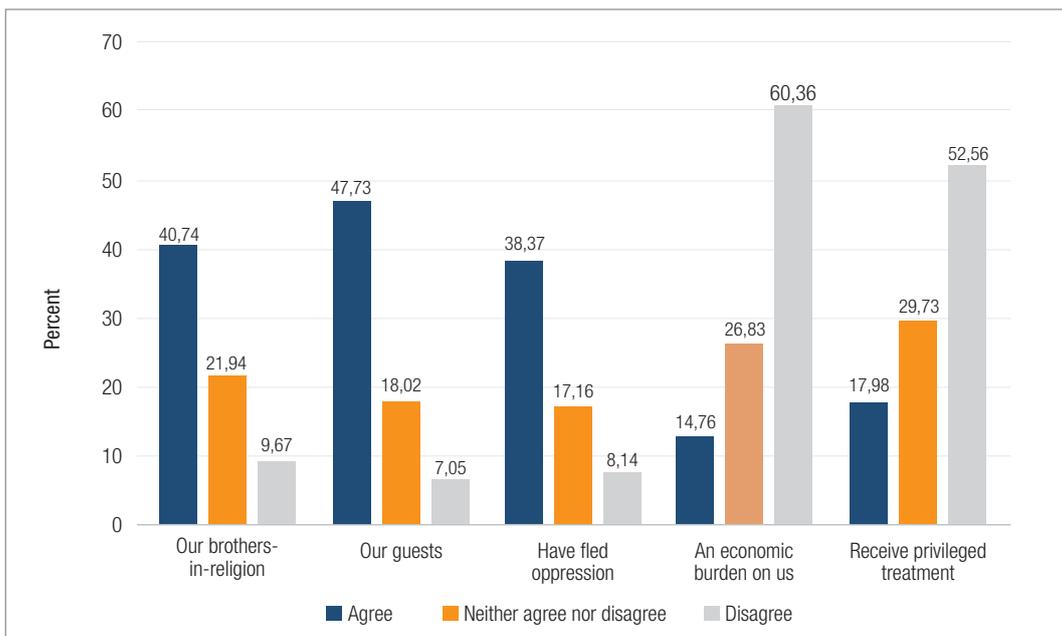


Figure 4.7 Levels of agreement with prominent political discourses about Syrians and support for conditional citizenship

One can argue that these findings reflect the respondents' party identity and that no genuine link exists between discourses about Syrians on the one hand and natives' attitudes and feelings toward refugees on the other. To test this possibility, we created a statistical model where we controlled for the participants' party preferences in addition to demographic variables. With this model, we analyzed the effect of support for religious brotherhood and economic burden discourses on participants' feelings about Syrian refugees. We treated support for the religious brotherhood discourse as a categorical variable with three levels: "We are brothers-in-religion," "We are not brothers-in-religion," and "Neutral." We defined support for the economic burden discourse as a numeric variable and coded it to range from 0 ("Lowest degree of support") to 1 ("Highest degree of support"). Moreover, considering the possibility of an interaction between the two variables, we added interaction terms to our model. We used ordinary least squares regression in our analysis and clustered standard errors at the neighborhood level due to the structure of our sample. We used calibration weights to ensure that our findings are generalizable to the population of Istanbul.

Our findings reveal that public discourses affect citizens' emotional state about Syrian refugees independently of partisan identity and demographic variables. They also point to a statistically and practically significant interaction between support for the religious brotherhood and economic burden discourses. To get a better sense of these findings, we present the results of our marginal effect analysis in Figure 4.8. The results show that there is a positive relationship between support for the religious brotherhood discourse and feelings about Syrians even when we hold the other variables in our model constant. However, as can

The results show that there is a positive relationship between support for the religious brotherhood discourse and feelings about Syrians even when we hold the other variables in our model constant.

be derived from the gradually vanishing distance between the red and blue lines, which respectively represent those who accept and reject religious fraternity with Syrians, the pro-refugee effect of the religious brotherhood discourse is weaker among those who see Syrians as an economic burden. At lowest levels of support for the economic burden discourse, there is a significant, 4-point gap between the average feelings of those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse and those who disagree. At the point where support for the economic burden discourse is at its highest level, this gap decreases to 1.2 points. Moreover, the red line's steeper slope in comparison with the blue line suggests that the negative association between the perception of economic burden and feelings about Syrian refugees is stronger among those who embrace the idea of religious brotherhood. When we move from the lowest to the highest support for the economic burden discourse, the average feelings of those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse decreases by 4.7 points. Compared with this steep decrease, the average feelings of those who say "We are not brothers in religion" decreases only by 1.9 points across the same interval.⁶²

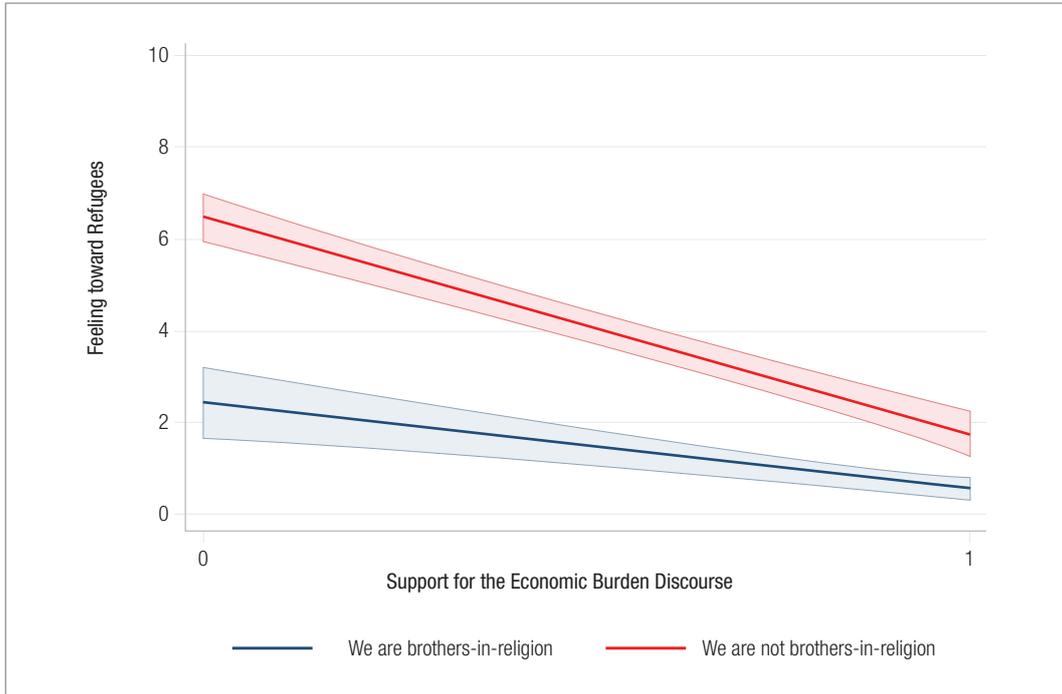


Figure 4.8 Religious Brotherhood, Agreement with the Economic Burden Discourse, and Feelings toward Syrians
Note: The shaded area shows the 95 percent confidence interval

We find similar results when we run the same analysis for conditional citizenship using binary logistic regression. As shown in Figure 4.9, there is a positive relationship between religious brotherhood and support for conditional citizenship. However, this relationship becomes

There is a positive relationship between religious brotherhood and support for conditional citizenship. However, this relationship becomes weaker at higher levels of agreement with the economic burden discourse.

weaker at higher levels of agreement with the economic burden discourse. Among those who see Syrians as brothers-in-religion and strongly reject the economic burden discourse, the probability of supporting conditional citizenship was calculated as 79.11 percent. Among those who see Syrians as brothers-in-religion but also strongly agree with the economic burden discourse, the same probability was calculated as 17.25 percent. Among those who do not see Syrians as brothers-in-religion, the probability of supporting conditional citizenship varies between 34.32 percent and 4.42 percent depending on degrees of agreement with the economic burden discourse.

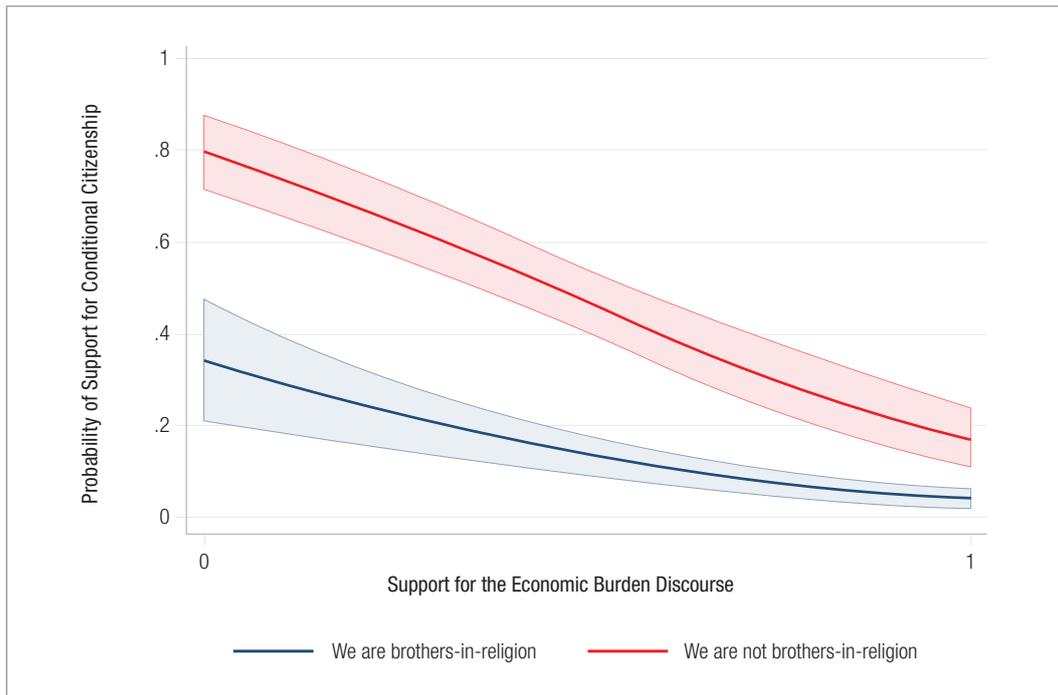


Figure 4.9 Religious Brotherhood, Agreement with the Economic Burden Discourse, and Support for Conditional Citizenship
Note: The shaded area shows the 95 percent confidence interval.

4.3 NATIONALISM AND XENOPHOBIA

A vast literature exists on the relationship between nationalism and attitudes toward immigrants. This literature shows that nationalist sentiments have a negative effect on native-born citizens' views on immigrants and that this effect is stronger among groups who perceive the nation as an ethnocultural community.⁶³ Moreover, it has been shown that ethnocentric tendencies, which cause individuals to be prejudiced against communities outside of their own ethnic and cultural ingroup, are linked with anti-immigrant feelings and attitudes.⁶⁴ Consistent with this pattern, studies have found that individuals who hold exclusionary attitudes toward one outgroup often hold exclusionary attitudes toward other outgroups as well.⁶⁵ On the other hand, when the majority of immigrants belong to the same ethnic group, prejudices about that particular group can also trigger anti-immigrant reactions in society.⁶⁶

Our survey included a series of questions that can give us an idea about the participants' nationalist and xenophobic tendencies. In one such question, the respondents were asked to define the sociopolitical identity that best describes them, i.e., the first identity that comes to their mind when they say, "We." 33.41 percent of the participants chose the option "Turkish Nationalist" to reply this question.⁶⁷ Given that ethnic nationalism sees cultural diversity as a threat, we also asked our survey respondents the degree to which they agree with the statement "I worry that the percentage of Turks in the population will decline relative to other ethnic groups." 46.96 percent "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement. Those who "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" were only 36.14 percent.

Figure 4.10 demonstrates the relation between answers to these two questions and feelings toward Syrian refugees. It shows that those who define their primary identity as Turkish nationalist (average feeling: 1.35) tend to have more negative feelings toward Syrians than do other participants (average feeling: 2.99). Similarly, those who worry that the percentage of Turks in the population is declining (average feeling: 1.42) feel much colder toward Syrians compared to those who do not express such a concern (average feeling: 3.70).

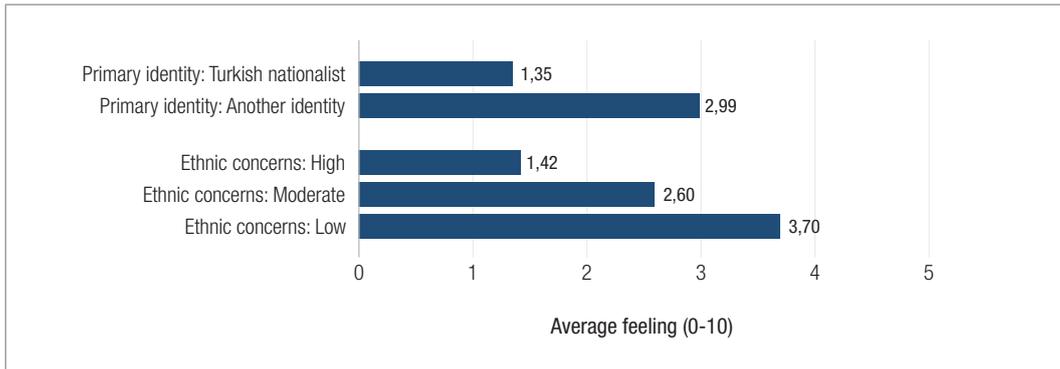


Figure 4.10 Nationalism, Level of Ethnic Anxiety, and Feelings about Syrians

Our findings also indicate that both Turkish nationalism and level of ethnic anxiety are strongly associated with support for conditional citizenship. As can be seen in Figure 4.11, only 11.23 percent of those who see themselves primarily as Turkish nationalist support the conditional citizenship policy. The same figure is 33.35 percent among the rest of the participants. When we examine how support for this policy is distributed according to levels of ethnic anxiety, we observe a more than 23-point gap between high-anxiety and low-anxiety groups.

Both Turkish nationalism and level of ethnic anxiety are strongly associated with support for conditional citizenship.

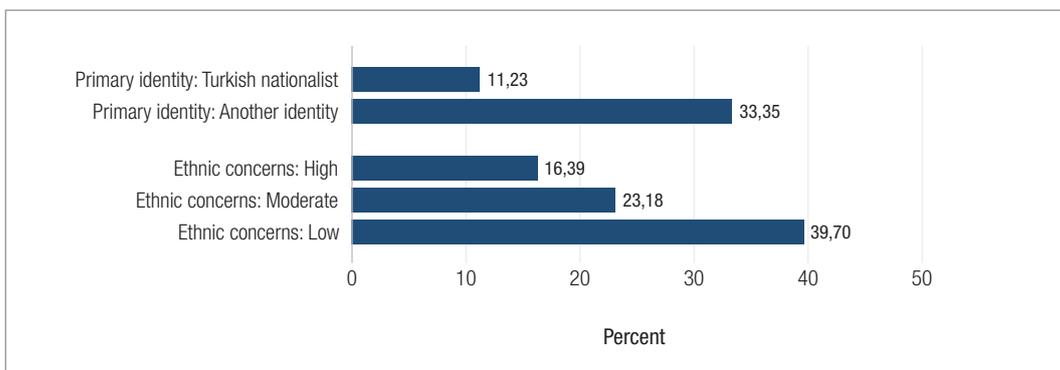


Figure 4.11 Nationalism, Levels of Ethnic Anxiety, and Support for Conditional Citizenship

We employed two separate methods for measuring Istanbul residents' generalized attitudes toward ethnic outgroups. In the first method, we created a feeling scale by calculating the average feeling our participants had about Uzbek, African, and Armenian immigrants (Cron-

bach's alpha coefficient: 0.78). In this scale from 0 to 10, points between 4.66 and 5.33 were coded as "Neutral," points below 4.66 as "Negative," and points above 5.33 as "Positive." Using this method, we found that 68.06 percent of our participants held negative feelings about foreign migrants, whereas those holding positive feelings were merely 14.05 percent. In the second method, we asked our interviewees which of the following three neighborhood types they would live in if they had the chance: (1) A neighborhood where almost everybody else is ethnically the same as you; (2) A neighborhood where the majority are ethnically the same as you; (3) A multicultural neighborhood where people from different ethnic groups live together. Those who picked the first and the second options were 37.21 percent and 41.07 percent respectively, while the share of those who preferred the multicultural neighborhood remained at 21.62 percent.

Figure 4.12 shows the relationship between attitudes toward ethnic outgroups and feelings toward Syrian refugees. As can be observed in the left panel in Figure 4.12, those who prefer to live in a multicultural neighborhood (average feeling: 3.49) have warmer feelings toward Syrians than do those who prefer an ethnically homogeneous neighborhood (average feeling: 1.83) or a neighborhood where their ethnic group constitutes the majority (average feeling: 2.44). Consistent with these findings, the right panel in Figure 4.12 shows that those who have more positive feelings toward Uzbek, African, and Armenian immigrants (average feeling: 4.55) also have warmer feelings toward Syrians when compared with those who tend to feel neutral (average feeling: 3.14) or negative (average feeling: 1.82) feelings about other immigrant groups.

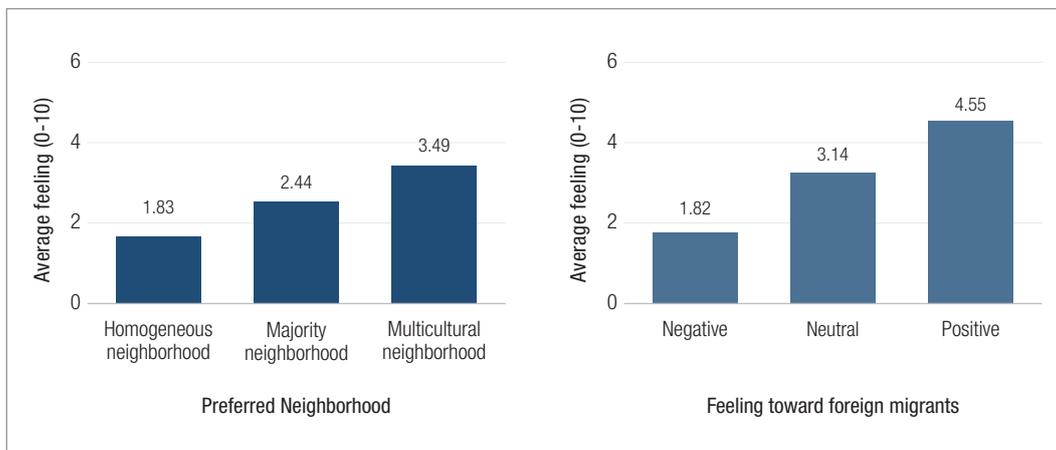


Figure 4.12 Attitudes toward Ethnic Outgroups and Feelings toward Syrians

Figure 4.13 reveals that generalized attitudes about ethnic outgroups are also related with Istanbul residents' opinions on the policy of extending citizenship to Syrians who satisfy certain criteria. The left panel in the figure shows that 34.09 percent of those who prefer to live in a multicultural neighborhood also support the conditional citizenship policy. The policy is supported by 24.27 percent of those who prefer an ethnically homogeneous neighborhood and 22.82 percent of those who prefer a neighborhood where they are the ethnic majority. Moreover, as the right panel shows, while support for the conditional citizenship policy is above 37 percent among those who have warmer feelings toward foreign immigrants, it is as low as 23.54 percent among those who feel colder toward international migrants.

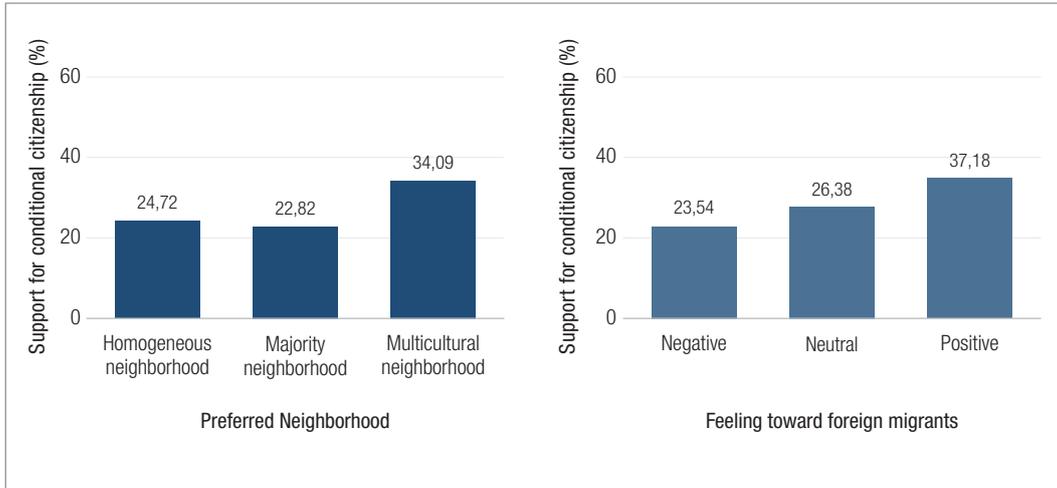


Figure 4.13 Attitudes toward Ethnic Out-Groups and Support for Conditional Citizenship

These results suggest that negative reactions against Syrian refugees are not only about them but in part reflect a generalized xenophobia.

These results suggest that negative reactions against Syrian refugees are not only about them but in part reflect a generalized xenophobia. Nonetheless, our data also points to specific prejudices about the Arabs that influence exclusionary attitudes toward Syrian refugees. When we asked our participants their opinions on the statement “Arabs have always backstabbed us throughout our history,” 66.47 percent either “agreed” or “strongly agreed.” Only 13.20 percent of our respondents “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement. When we break down levels of agreement by party preference, we can

see that anti-Arab attitudes are widespread in every voter group except HDP voters (Figure 4.14).

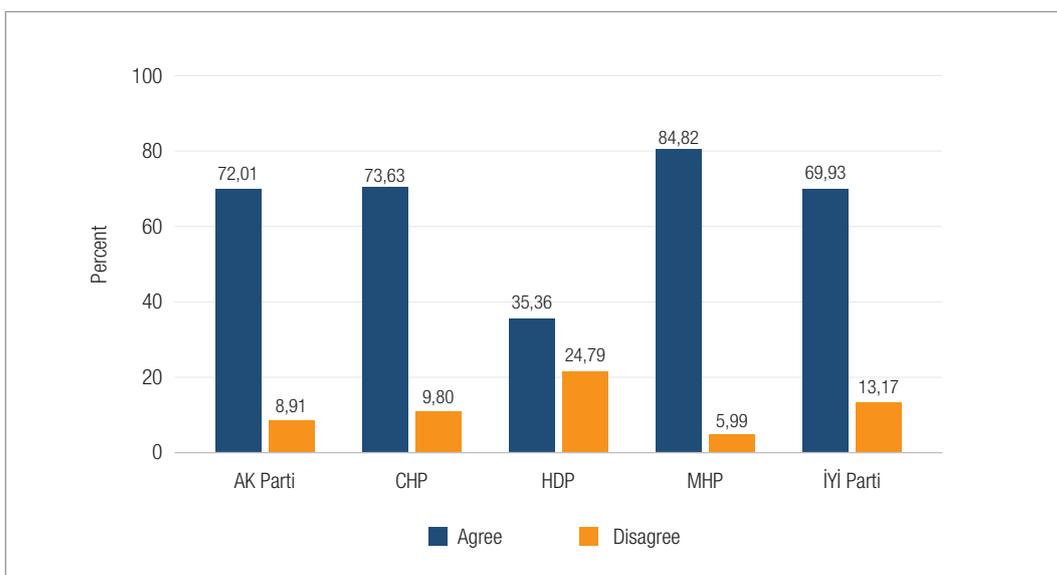


Figure 4.14 Anti-Arab Prejudice by Party Preference

Figure 4.15 underscores the association between anti-Arab prejudice on the one hand and feelings and attitudes toward Syrian refugees on the other. As we can see in the left panel, those who agree (average feeling: 1.99) with the statement “Arabs have always backstabbed us throughout our history” have colder feelings toward Syrians than do those who disagree with the statement (average feeling: 3.58). The right panel shows a more than 21-point gap between those who agree (21.02 percent support) and those who disagree (42.39 percent support) in their support for conditional citizenship.

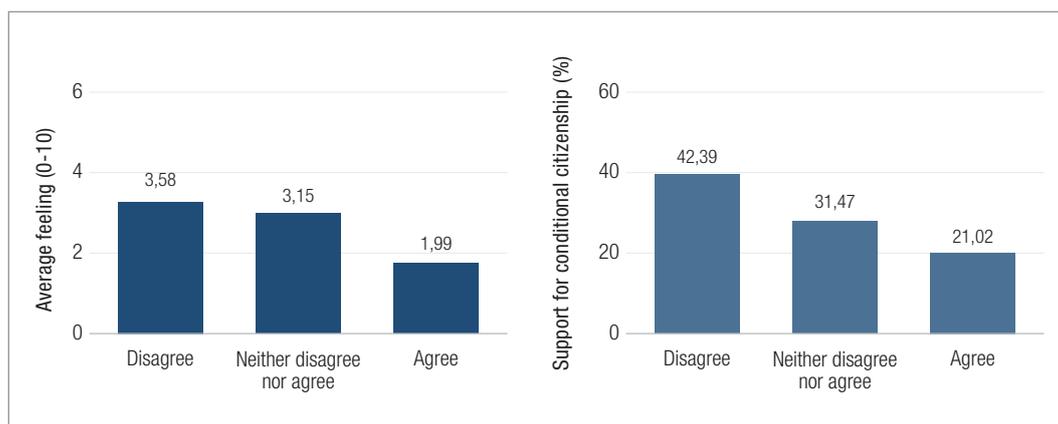


Figure 4.15 The relation between anti-Arab prejudice and Attitudes toward Syrians

4.4 LIFESTYLE CONCERNS

Some qualitative studies have noted that citizens with secular lifestyles associate Syrian refugees with cultural threats such as rising conservatism in society, the abolition of laicism, and the distancing of Turkey from Western civilization.⁶⁸ However, lifestyle cleavages have not been adequately addressed in quantitative studies on public attitudes toward Syrians.

To fill this gap, we first addressed how religious conservative identity and religiosity were related to attitudes toward Syrian refugees. We coded Sunni respondents who picked “Conservative/Religious” as their primary sociopolitical identity as “religious conservative.” These individuals make up 36.28 percent of the Sunni participants in our sample and 32.82 percent of the full sample. Our measurement of participants’ levels of religiosity was based on their responses to the following four statements:

- My religious identity and faith have a very important place in my life.
- Religious education should be compulsory starting in elementary school
- Religious marriage is essential for a man and a woman to live together.⁶⁹
- I try to regularly perform my religious practices.

We asked our participants to evaluate these four statements on a scale of 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”). Taking the mean of the answers, we created a religiosity scale (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient: 0.90). In this scale, where 1 stands for the lowest and 5 for the highest level of religiosity, Sunni participants had a mean religiosity of 3.97, while the mean

for all participants was 3.82. We divided respondents into three groups according to their religiosity levels: “Low” (3 or lower), “Moderate” (3.25-4.25), and “High” (4.5 or higher).

Figure 4.16 illuminates the link between religious conservative identity and attitudes toward Syrians. The left panel shows the average feeling of religious-conservative Sunni participants, which is 3.31. For Sunni participants who do not see themselves as religious conservative, the average is 1.72, much lower. The difference between the two is both statistically and practically significant. The right panel shows a much stronger support for conditional citizenship among religious conservatives. While nearly 40 percent of religious-conservative Sunnis support conditional citizenship, only 15.78 percent of the remaining Sunni participants support the policy.

While nearly 40 percent of religious-conservative Sunnis support conditional citizenship, only 15.78 percent of the remaining Sunni participants support the policy.

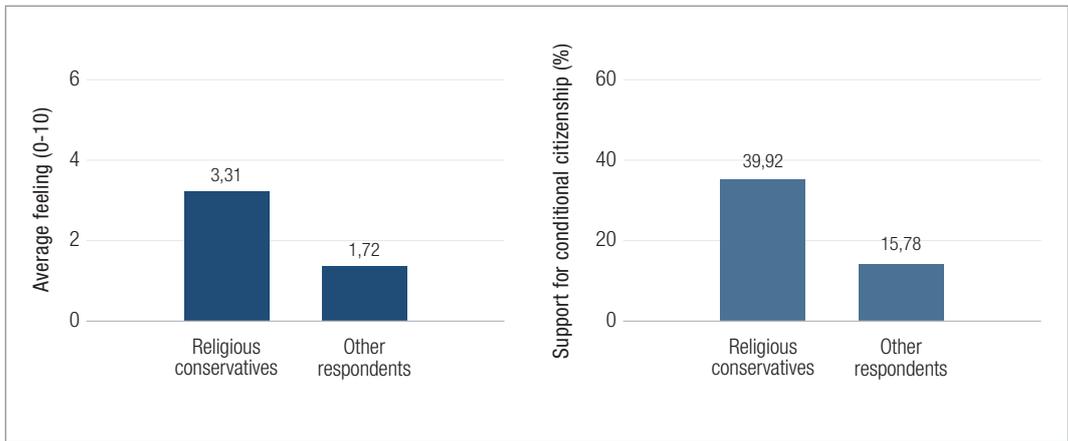


Figure 4.16 Religious Conservative Identity and Attitudes toward Syrians (Sunni participants)

The relation between religiosity and attitudes toward Syrians displays a more complicated pattern. The left panel in Figure 4.17 shows that moderately religious respondents hold the most negative feelings toward Syrians (average feeling: 1.77). Those with low (average feeling: 2.63) or high (average feeling: 2.68) levels of religiosity have relatively warmer feelings. One reason for this pattern is the concentration of those who define themselves as “Turkish nationalist” in the moderate religiosity group. It can be claimed that, for this group, national identity is dominant over religious identity; therefore, commonality on the basis of Islam does not provide sufficient motivation for solidarity with Syrian refugees. On the other hand, when we look at the right panel in Figure 4.14, we see that 35.14 percent of highly religious participants support conditional citizenship and that this ratio falls to about 16-17 percent among the remaining participants. There is no significant difference between those with low and moderate levels of religiosity in terms of their support for conditional citizenship.

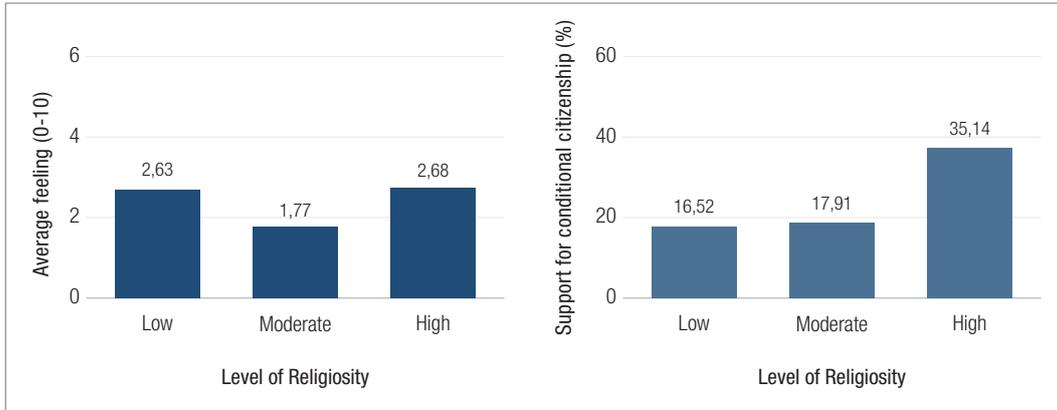


Figure 4.17 Religiosity and Attitudes toward Syrians (Sunni participants)

To gain insight into some of the identity and lifestyle concerns that are particularly common among secular groups, we asked our participants the degree to which they agreed with the following three statements:

- Turkey belongs in the modern Western world.
- I worry that laicism will be abolished in the near future.
- I worry that women's freedoms will be restricted in the coming years.

Figure 4.18 depicts the relation between agreement levels with these statements and feelings toward Syrians. According to our data, those who believe Turkey belongs in the modern Western world (average feeling: 1.41) have colder feelings toward Syrians compared to those who disagree with this view (average feeling: 2.65). This finding suggests that some citizens

Those who believe Turkey belongs in the modern Western world (average feeling: 1.41) have colder feelings toward Syrians compared to those who disagree with this view (average feeling: 2.65).

associate Syrians with Turkey's drift away from the West. Concerns over the demise of laicism and women's freedoms are also relevant to feelings about Syrian refugees. Average feeling about Syrians is 1.20, extremely low, among participants who are worried about the possible abolition of laicism. By contrast, the average feeling among those who are not concerned is as high as 3.12. Similarly, those who are concerned about possible restrictions on women's freedoms have an average feeling of 1.25, and those who are not concerned have an average of 3.27.

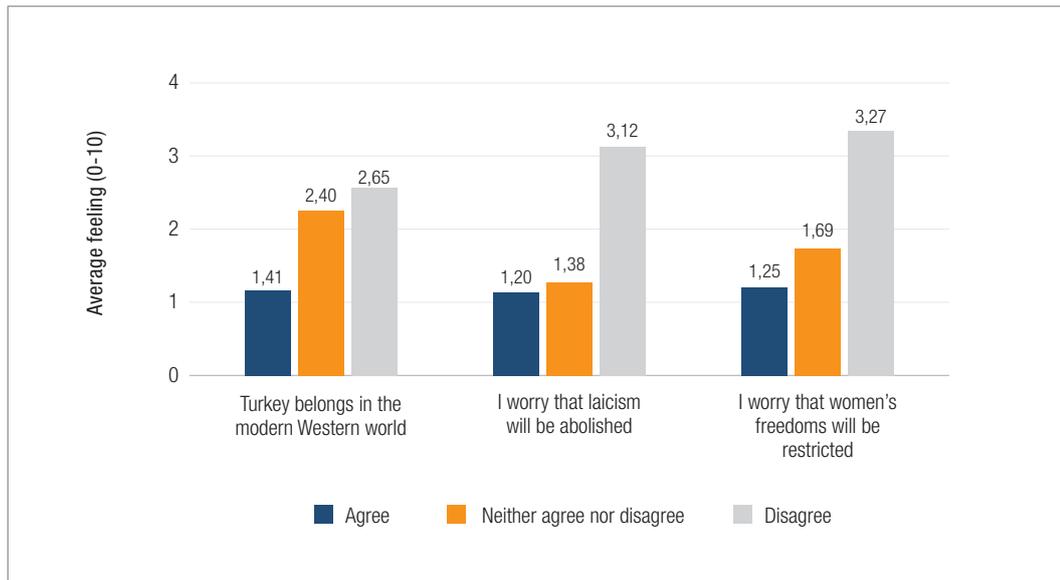


Figure 4.18 Lifestyle Anxieties and Average Feeling toward Syrians

As can be seen in Figure 4.19, lifestyle concerns are also connected to levels of support for conditional citizenship. Only one in five of those who agree with the statement “Turkey belongs in the modern Western world” support the conditional citizenship policy, whereas support for the policy is almost 16 points higher among those who disagree with the statement. Similarly, while support for the policy is around 18-19 percent among those who are concerned about the demise of laicism and women’s freedoms, it increases to 36-38 percent among those who do not share this concern.

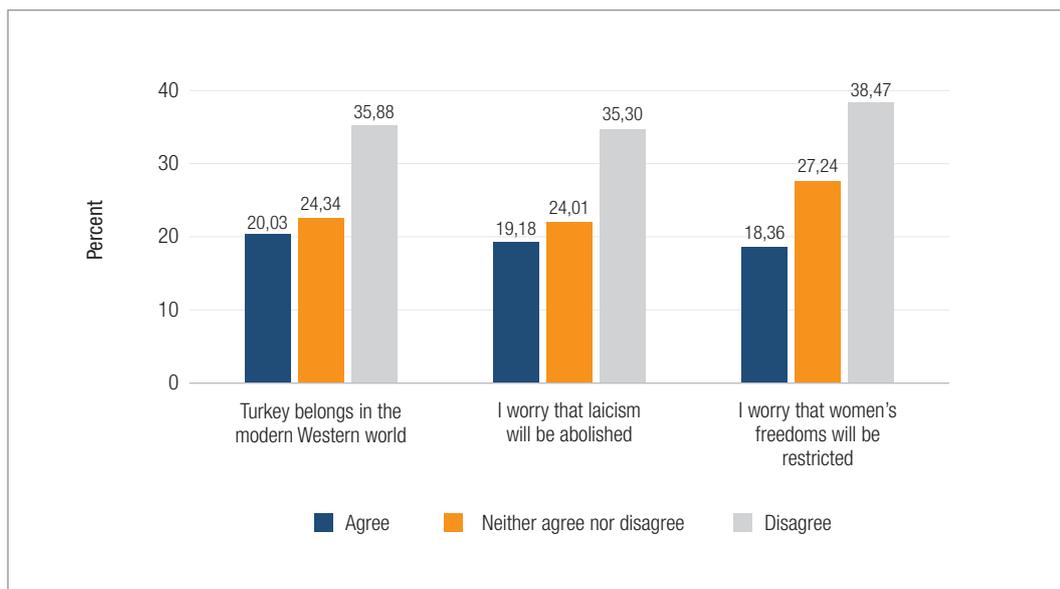


Figure 4.19 Lifestyle Concerns and Support for Conditional Citizenship

4.5 EKONOMİK KAYGILAR

Needless to say, attitudes toward international migrants are not only related to matters of identity and cultural concerns. Prior studies have found a strong connection between the concern that newcomers might hurt the host society's economic welfare and exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants.⁷⁰ Additionally, scholars have demonstrated that poor economic conditions tend to intensify anti-immigration and anti-immigrant tendencies.⁷¹ Although there are contrary findings, it has also been shown that personal economic concerns can contribute to attitudes that marginalize immigrants.⁷²

Against this backdrop, we asked our participants questions about their anxieties regarding both the economic performance of the nation and their own household income. Based on their responses, we divided the participants into three groups: those who had "high," "moderate," and "low" levels of anxiety. Our data shows that 65.33 percent of our participants had a high level of anxiety about the economic performance of the nation. Those who had a low level of anxiety constituted only 22.25 percent of the sample. As for their own household income, 47.29 percent of the respondents had a high level of anxiety, whereas 29.58 percent had a low level of anxiety.

Our data shows that 65.33 percent of our participants had a high level of anxiety about the economic performance of the nation. Those who had a low level of anxiety constituted only 22.25 percent of the sample.

As concerns about the economic performance of the country increase, the average feeling toward Syrians decreases.

Below, we discuss the relationship between these anxieties and attitudes toward Syrians. As can be seen in Figure 4.20, as concerns about the economic performance of the country increase, the average feeling toward Syrians decreases. There is an approximately 1.5-point difference in average feeling between those with high (average feeling: 1.99) and low (average feeling: 3.46) levels of anxiety. When we look at participants' anxieties about their own household income, we see a more complicated picture. The difference in average feeling between participants with high (average feeling: 2.41) and low (average feeling: 2.79) levels of anxiety is relatively small. Moreover, those who are moderately anxious (average feeling: 2.05) express more negative feelings than those who are highly anxious (average feeling: 2.41).

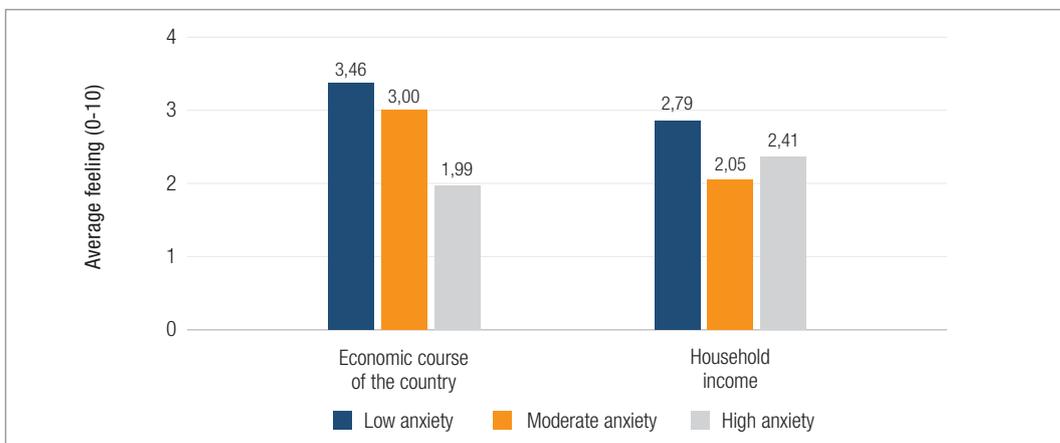


Figure 4.20 Economic Anxieties and Feelings toward Syrians

A similar picture appears when we examine the relationship between economic anxieties and support for conditional citizenship. As Figure 4.21 shows, 51.73 percent of those who have a low level of anxiety about the nation's economic performance support conditional citizenship. Support for the policy is as low as 17.54 percent among those who have a high level of anxiety. The 34-point gap between the two groups is striking. When we turn to anxieties about household income, a more modest relationship is observed. 36.37 percent of those who have a low level of anxiety about their household income support the conditional citizenship policy. In comparison, support for the policy is around 21 percent among those who are moderately or highly anxious.

Based on these findings, it can be argued that concerns about the general economic situation exert a stronger effect on attitudes toward Syrians than personal economic anxieties. In other words, natives' negative attitudes toward Syrian refugees are driven less by a pure self-interest motivation than by the perception that an "outgroup" is exploiting "our" economic resources.

51.73 percent of those who have a low level of anxiety about the nation's economic performance support conditional citizenship. Support for the policy is as low as 17.54 percent among those who have a high level of anxiety.

In other words, natives' negative attitudes toward Syrian refugees are driven less by a pure self-interest motivation than by the perception that an "outgroup" is exploiting "our" economic resources.

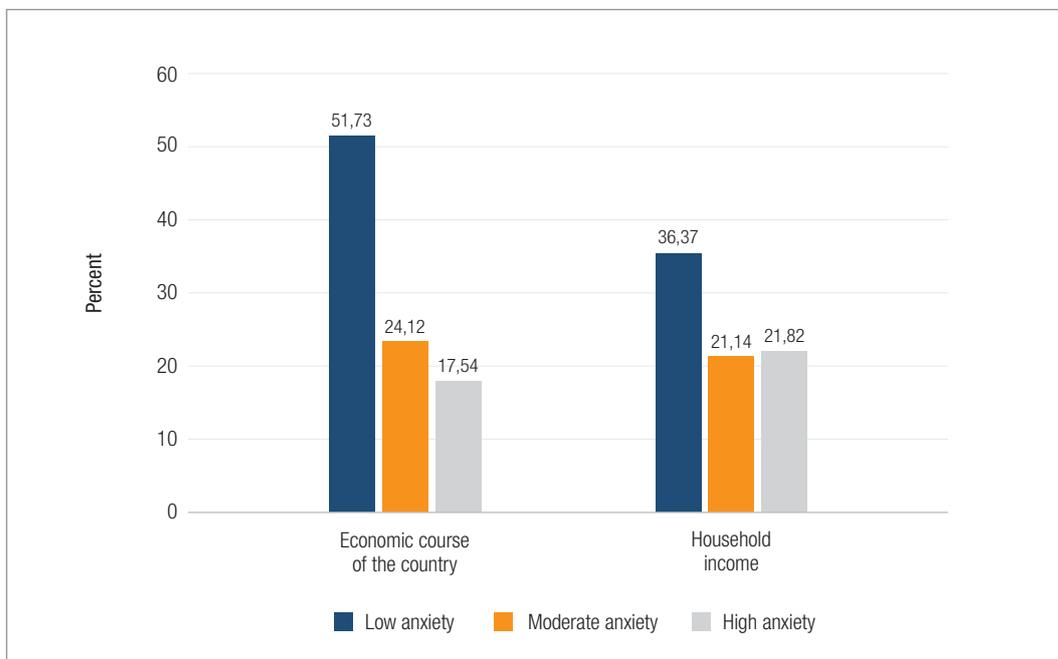


Figure 4.21 Economic Anxieties and Support for Conditional Citizenship

We should not, however, overlook the possibility that the association between personal financial concerns and attitudes toward Syrians can differ from group to group. To test this possibility, we conducted a logistic regression analysis where support for conditional citizenship

was the dependent variable and demographic factors were controlled for. In addition to the party preferences of participants, we included in our model “personal financial anxiety” as a continuous variable that ranges from 0 (“lowest level of anxiety”) to 1 (“highest level of anxiety”). We also created interaction terms between party preference and personal financial anxiety and added them to our model.

Our analysis shows that the relationship between personal financial anxiety and attitudes toward Syrian refugees are stronger among AK Parti voters. To illustrate this finding, in Figure 4.22 we present the results of marginal effect estimations comparing AK Parti and CHP voters. According to these estimations, when we move from the lowest level of financial anxiety to the highest level, the probability of supporting conditional citizenship decreases by nearly 49 points among AK Parti voters (from 63.38 percent to 14.54 percent). In comparison, the same probability decreases by 21 points among CHP voters from 27.88 percent to 6.80 percent. To put it differently, the impact of personal financial anxiety on support for conditional citizenship is 2.3 times stronger among AK Parti voters than among CHP voters. Moreover, as the intersecting confidence intervals suggest, at the highest level of personal financial anxiety, the difference between AK Parti and CHP voters is statistically negligible.

Our analysis shows that the relationship between personal financial anxiety and attitudes toward Syrian refugees are stronger among AK Parti voters.

At the highest level of personal financial anxiety, the difference between AK Parti and CHP voters is statistically negligible.

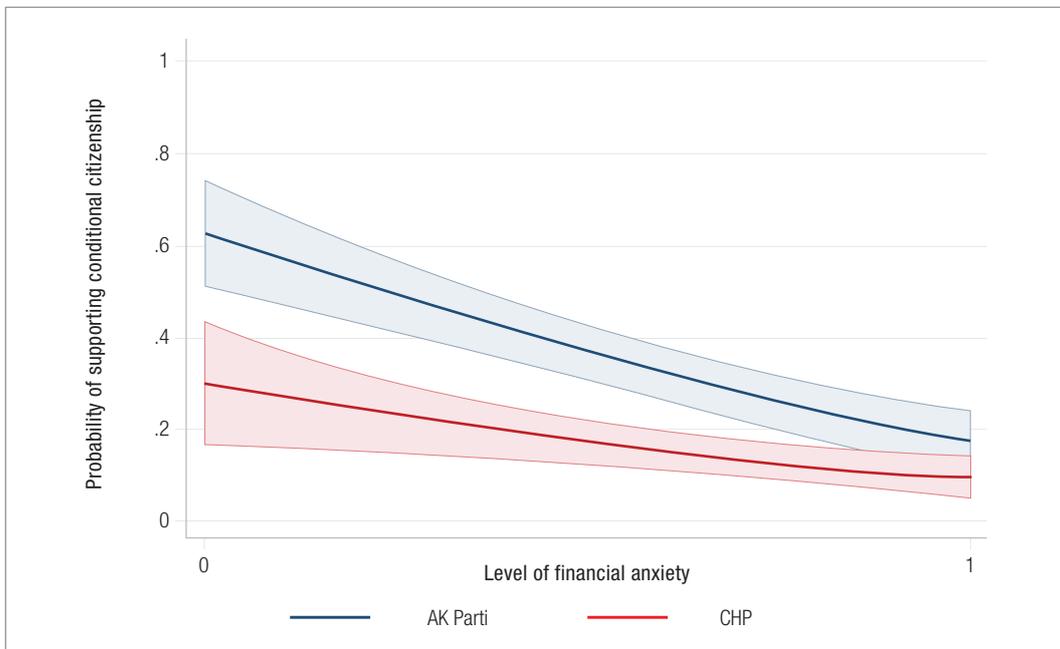


Figure 4.22 Party Preference, Personal Financial Anxiety, and Support for Conditional Citizenship

Note: The shaded area shows the 95 percent confidence interval.

4.6 CONCERNS ABOUT SECURITY

Previous studies have shown that anti-immigrant tendencies can be animated by security-related concerns as well as economic and cultural anxieties.⁷³ When the migration in question is caused by a war and massive in size, we can predict such anxieties about security to be more pronounced. Therefore, it should not be surprising to find that security-related concerns play a major role in shaping Turkish citizens' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. With this in mind, we included in our survey questions that measure participants' concerns about both personal and societal security. To measure concerns about personal security, we asked our participants the following question: "How secure do you feel in the neighborhood you live in?" Participants answered this question on a scale of 1 ("Not secure at all") to 5 ("Very secure"). To measure concerns about societal security, we asked participants whether they agreed with the following two statements:

- I am worried that crimes like homicide, larceny, and rape will increase in the coming years.
- I am worried that our country will suffer large-scale terrorist attacks in the near future

For each of these three questions, we divided our respondents into three groups: those with "high," "moderate," and "low" levels of anxiety. The results suggest that concerns about national security are much higher than those about personal security. Only 25.34 percent of our participants were classified as highly anxious in terms of personal security. In contrast, those who were highly anxious about increases in crime rates or large-scale terrorist incidents were 67.07 percent and 57.24 percent, respectively.

Figure 4.23 shows a strong relationship between security-related anxieties and feelings toward Syrian refugees. Those who are highly anxious about an increase in rates of larceny, homicide, and rape have an average feeling of 1.41, whereas those who have a low level of anxiety about these issues have an average feeling of 3.54. Similarly, those who are highly anxious about the possibility of large-scale terrorist incidents have an average feeling of 1.26, while the average of those who have a low level of anxiety is 3.57. Given that we did not mention Syrian refugees in the questions we asked to measure anxiety levels, the substantial difference between high-anxiety and low-anxiety groups is noteworthy. Nonetheless, the connection between concerns about personal security and feelings toward Syrians appears to be weak. The difference in feelings between high-anxiety (average feeling: 2.05) and low-anxiety (average feeling: 2.60) groups is only about half-a-point.

The results suggest that concerns about national security are much higher than those about personal security.

Those who are highly anxious about an increase in rates of larceny, homicide, and rape have an average feeling of 1.41, whereas those who have a low level of anxiety about these issues have an average feeling of 3.54.

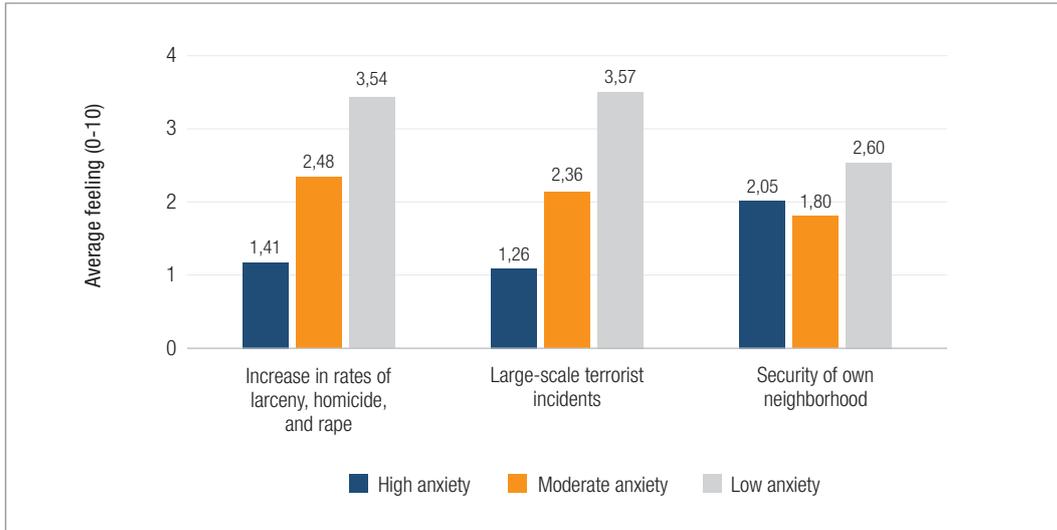


Figure 4.23 Anxieties about Security and Feelings toward Syrians

A similar picture emerges when we consider the relationship between security-related concerns and support for conditional citizenship (Figure 4.24). Of those who are lowly anxious about crime rates, 51.03 percent support the conditional citizenship policy. This ratio drops to 17.18 percent in the high-anxiety group. In a similar fashion, 47.48 percent of those who have a low level of anxiety about potential terrorist attacks support conditional citizenship, whereas only 15.08 percent in the high-anxiety group do so.

Again, concerns about personal security are less strongly related to levels of support for conditional citizenship. 37.87 percent of those who are not very anxious about their personal security support the policy. In the moderate- and high-anxiety groups, by contrast, support for the policy is around 23 percent. Therefore, as with economic concerns, the dominant factor is group interests, not personal ones.

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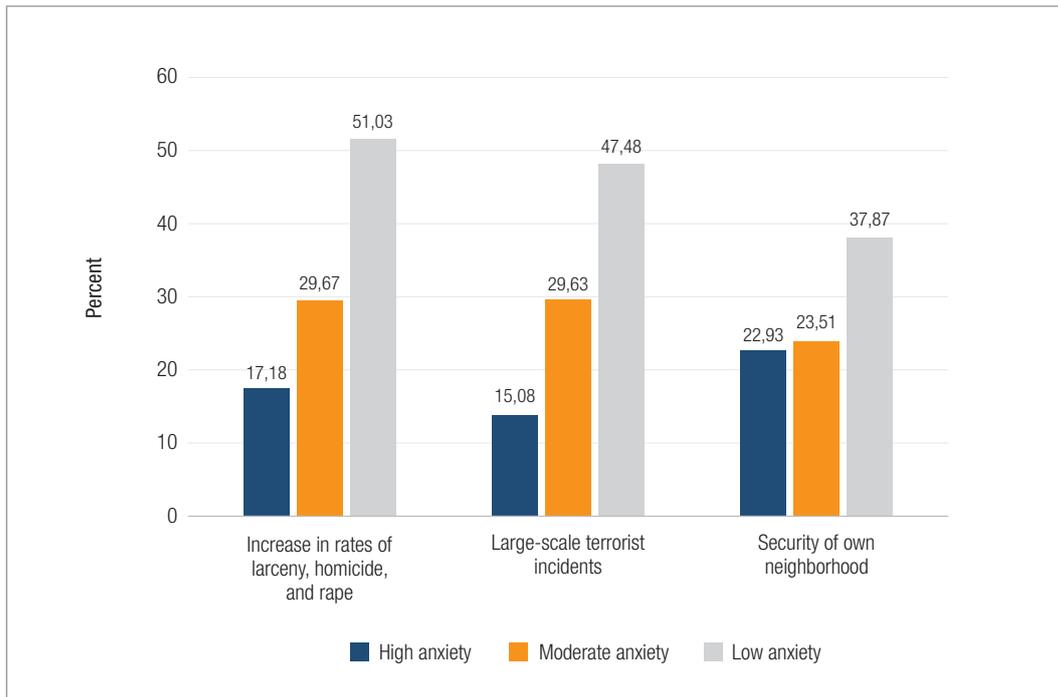


Figure 4.24 Anxieties about Security and Support for Conditional Citizenship

4.7 INTERGROUP CONTACT

The positive effects of social contact are thought to materialize mainly in intimate and long-term relations rather than superficial and transitory ones.

In his 1954 book *The Nature of Prejudice*, the American social psychologist Gordon Allport argued that social contact between individuals from different groups would decrease those individuals' prejudices against outgroups, but he added that this effect is conditional on several factors such as equal status and shared goals among the participants.⁷⁴ Countless studies have since proven that intergroup contact may mitigate social prejudices, even if all the conditions listed by Allport are not fulfilled.⁷⁵ However, the positive effects of social contact are

thought to materialize mainly in intimate and long-term relations rather than superficial and transitory ones.⁷⁶ Moreover, negative contact experiences have been shown to reinforce marginalizing attitudes toward outgroups.⁷⁷

In this study, we examined Istanbulites' social contacts with Syrian refugees at the level of both everyday encounters and friendship. To measure everyday encounters, we asked our participants how frequently they encounter Syrians in (i) the workplace, (ii) public transportation, (iii) public spaces such as parks and waterfronts, (iv) school/educational institutions, (v) hospitals, (vi) mosques/places of worship, (vii) their neighborhoods/streets, and (viii) commercial areas/street markets/shopping malls. Participants answered this question by choosing between "frequently," "sometimes," or "never." To measure social contact at the level of friendship, we asked the following "yes" or "no" question: "Besides these everyday encounters, are there any Syrian refugees you closely know or regularly meet?"

As Figure 4.25 shows, shopping malls and public spaces such as parks and waterfronts are where participants most frequently encounter Syrian refugees. These are followed by public transportation and participants' own neighborhoods. Workplaces and educational institutions are where refugees are least encountered. Overall, these results suggest that Istanbul residents encounter Syrian refugees quite frequently in their everyday lives.

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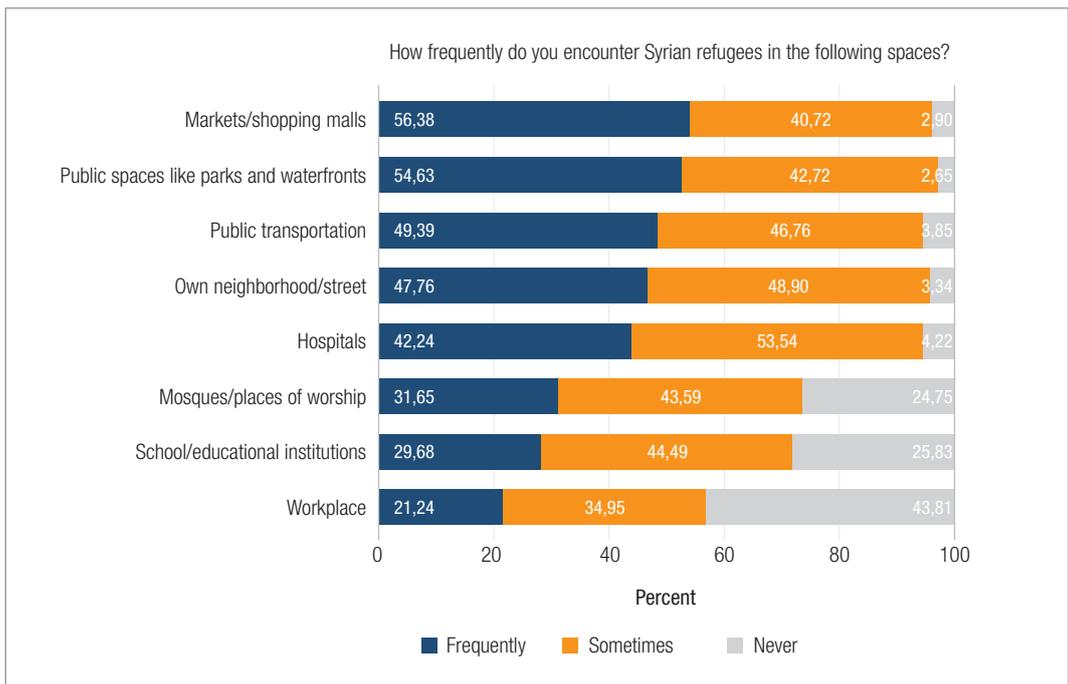


Figure 4.25 Frequency of Encounters with Syrian Refugees in Everyday Life

Very few locals develop intimate and regular relations with Syrian refugees beyond these everyday encounters, however. As Figure 4.26 shows, only 6.34 percent of our participants have contacts with Syrians that could qualify as friendship. While there are some differences by gender and level of education, the real divergence in this issue emerges on the basis of ethnic and religious identity. While only 5.3 percent of Turks indicate that they closely know a Syrian refugee, this figure increases to 11.63 percent among Kurds. Likewise, only 5.99 percent of Sunni respondents report that they closely know a Syrian refugee, whereas 9.25 percent of Alevi respondents do so.

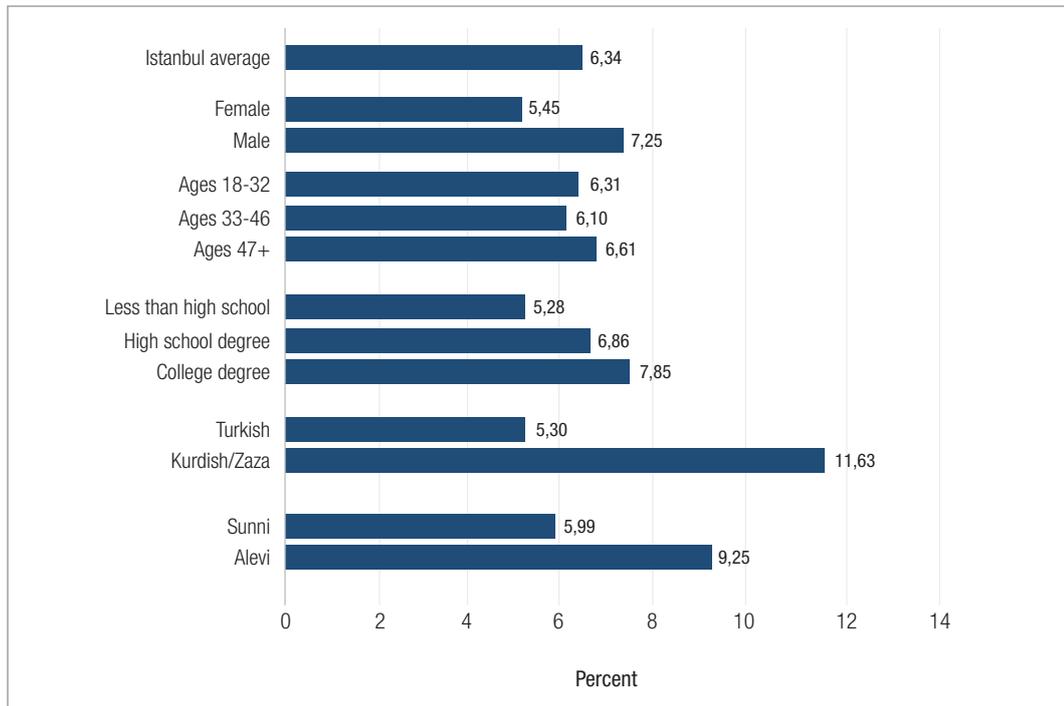


Figure 4.26 Rates of having close relationships with Syrians among various demographic groups

To see whether a connection exists between social contact and attitudes toward Syrian refugees, we first looked at everyday encounters. For this purpose, we compared participants who said they frequently encounter Syrians in the above-listed spaces and those who said they sometimes or never encounter Syrians. Figure 4.27 makes this comparison in terms of participants' feelings toward Syrians. One can clearly see in this figure that participants who frequently encounter Syrians in their everyday lives do not hold more positive feelings toward them. On the contrary, it can be argued that there is an inverse relationship, albeit not strong, between everyday encounters and feelings toward Syrians. This applies most strongly to workplace encounters. The average feeling about Syrians among those who frequently encounter Syrian refugees in their workplace is as low as 1.10. In comparison, the average feeling among those who sometimes or never encounter Syrians is 2.80.

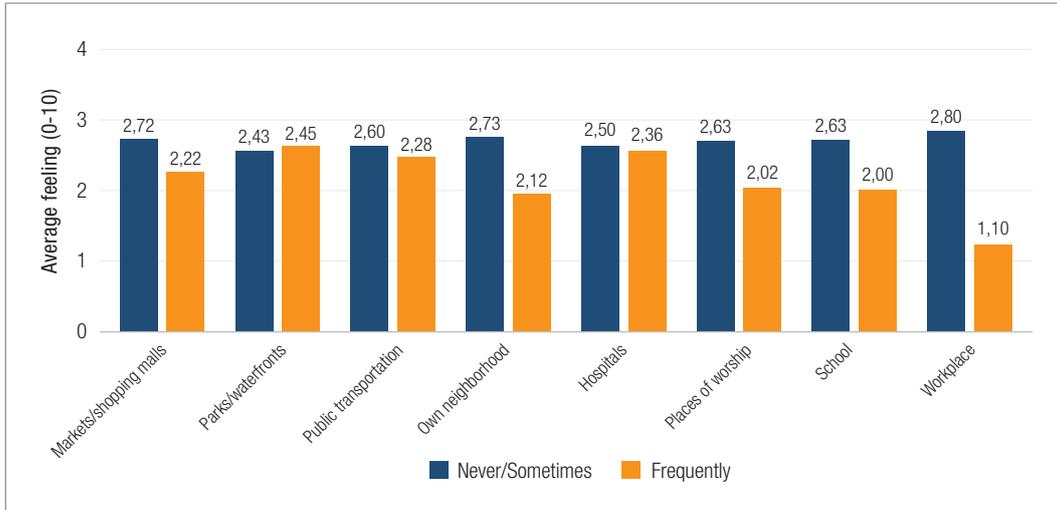


Figure 4.27 Everyday Encounters and Feelings toward Syrians

We see a similar pattern in support for conditional citizenship (Figure 4.28). Those who frequently encounter Syrian refugees in their everyday lives do not view the policy more positively. On the contrary, those who say they frequently encounter Syrians in their workplace support conditional citizenship significantly less (8.73 percent) than the general average. In summary, there is no indication that everyday encounters have a positive effect on feelings and attitudes toward Syrians refugees.

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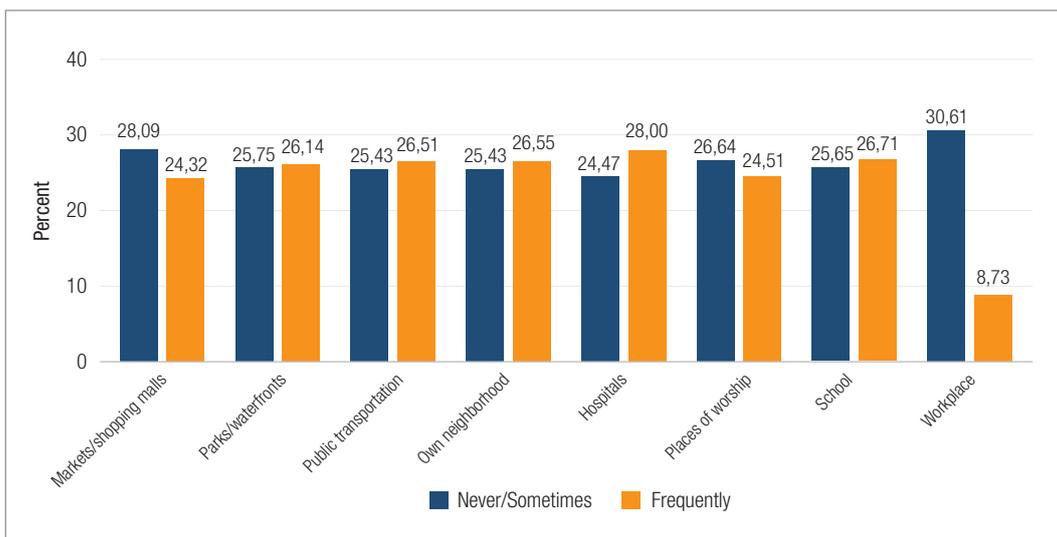


Figure 4.28 Everyday Encounters and Support for Conditional Citizenship

On the other hand, participants who have established close and recurrent relationships with Syrians hold more positive feelings about Syrians. As can be seen in Figure 4.29, the average feeling toward Syrians is 2.15 among those whose social contact with refugees is limited to

everyday encounters. In contrast, average feeling is as high as 6.69 among those who have established closer ties with refugees. The gap between the two groups is 4.5 points.

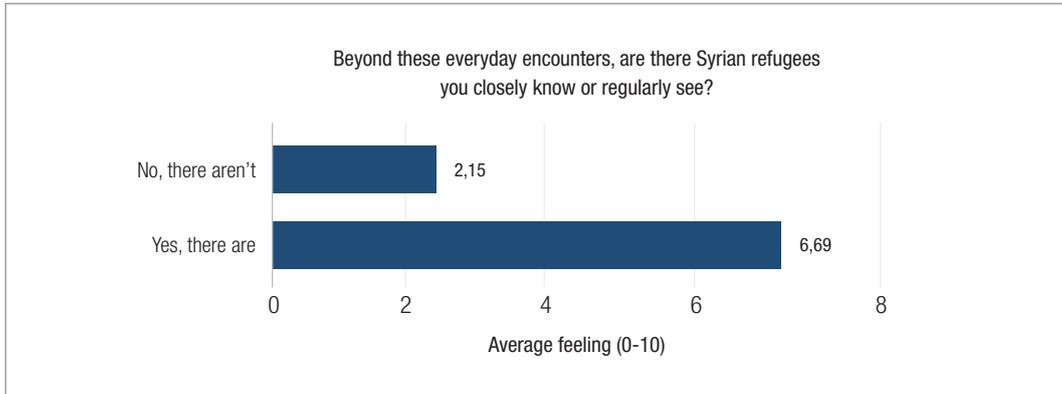


Figure 4.29 Close Social Contact with Refugees and Feelings toward Syrians

The association between close social contact with refugees and support for conditional citizenship is equally strong (Figure 4.30). Almost 65 percent of those who have established close ties with refugees are in favor of extending citizenship to Syrians who have no criminal record and have the skills to practice professions that are in demand in Turkey. This rate goes down to 23.32 percent among those who have not had any close contact with Syrians.

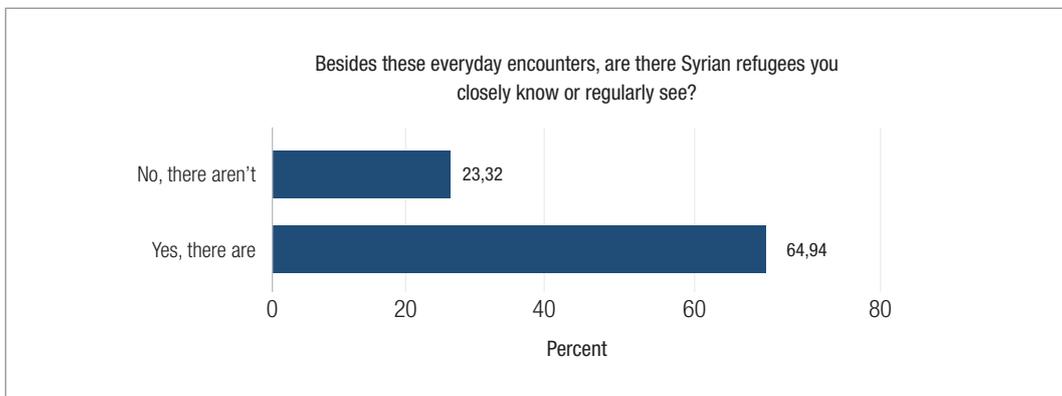


Figure 4.30 Close Social Contact with Refugees and Support for Conditional Citizenship

Our data is not sufficient to prove that close social contact with refugees produces positive feelings and attitudes toward them. After all, the causal relationship can operate both ways: just as social contact can lead to positive feelings and attitudes toward refugees, positive feelings and attitudes toward refugees can lead to social contact. In other words, people with weaker prejudices against Syrians may be more likely to develop close relationships with them. Nonetheless, there is enough ground for optimism on this issue, given the established link between social contact and positive outgroup attitudes in the existing literature and the strength of the association in our data.

5

PROFILE OF AN IDEAL SYRIAN REFUGEE

Experimental studies conducted in recent years especially in Western countries have shown that host society members tend to be more open to accepting immigrants who are highly educated, engaged in a learned profession, proficient in the language of the host society, and culturally similar to themselves. These studies suggest that native-born populations do not perceive newcomers as a homogeneous whole and prefer certain groups of immigrants over others.⁷⁸ However, to date, almost all research conducted in Turkey to study natives' views on Syrians has treated refugees as a monolithic group, failing to examine whether Turkish citizens discriminate between different groups of newcomers.

To fill this gap in the literature, we included a survey experiment in our study. Using gender, age group, marital status, professional background, and fluency in Turkish, we first created 72 distinct refugee profiles. In choosing these variables and their values, we relied on our focus group discussions and the main themes that emerged from the meetings (Table 5.1).

To date, almost all research conducted in Turkey to study natives' views on Syrians has treated refugees as a monolithic group, failing to examine whether Turkish citizens discriminate between different groups of newcomers.

Table 5.1 Variables used in creating refugee profiles and their values

Variable	Value
Gender	Female
	Male
Age Group	Young: 27, 28
	Middle-aged: 43, 44
	Old: 64, 65
Marital Status	Unmarried
	Married without children
	Married with 2 children
Professional Background	Worker
	Male: in a furniture workshop, in a shoe factory
	Female: in a textile workshop, in a spinning factory
	Professional
	Male: mechanical engineer, architect
Female: chemical engineer, architect	
Fluency in Turkish	Poor
	Fluent

Below are some refugee profiles we created using the variables in Table 5.1:

- This person is a 27-year-old SINGLE MALE. He used to be a WORKER in a furniture workshop back in Syria. He speaks Turkish POORLY.
- This person is a 28-year-old SINGLE MALE. He used to be a WORKER in a shoe factory back in Syria. He speaks Turkish FLUENTLY.
- This person is a 28-year-old SINGLE FEMALE. She used to be an ARCHITECT in a private firm back in Syria. She speaks Turkish FLUENTLY.
- This person is a 44-year-old FEMALE, MARRIED WITHOUT CHILDREN. She used to be an ARCHITECT in a private firm back in Syria. She speaks Turkish FLUENTLY.
- This person is a 43-year-old MALE, MARRIED WITHOUT CHILDREN. He used to be a MECHANICAL ENGINEER at a private firm back in Syria. He speaks Turkish POORLY.
- This person is a 64-year-old MALE, MARRIED WITH 2 CHILDREN. He used to be a MECHANICAL ENGINEER at a private firm back in Syria. He speaks Turkish POORLY.
- This person is a 64-year-old FEMALE, MARRIED WITH 2 CHILDREN. She used to be a WORKER in a textile workshop back in Syria. She speaks Turkish POORLY.
- This person is a 65-year old FEMALE, MARRIED WITH 2 CHILDREN. She used to be an ARCHITECT in a private firm back in Syria. She speaks Turkish FLUENTLY.

In our survey, we asked each of our respondents to evaluate six randomly chosen profiles and tell us whether they would approve granting this person permanent residence. We used the following question format:

I want to learn about the kind of refugees and personal qualities you would prioritize if our country decides to grant permanent residence permits to a limited number of Syrian refugees. For this purpose, I will show you 6 different refugee profiles and ask you the degree to which you approve granting this person a residence permit. For this purpose, I will ask you to choose a number between 1 and 7, where (1) represents “*Strongly disapprove*,” (2) “*Disapprove*,” (3) “*Partially disapprove*,” (4) “*Neither approve nor disapprove*,” (5) “*Partially approve*,” (6) “*Approve*,” and (7) “*Strongly approve*.”

With each respondent evaluating six different profiles, we generated a dataset involving 13,704 profile assessments. To facilitate the interpretation of our results, we transformed profile assessments into a dichotomous variable, in which 1 represents approval of granting residence permit and 0 represents disapproval. In order to do that, the 7-point scale was recoded into a binary, where the values 5, 6, and 7 were coded as 1 and the remaining values as 0. We used binary logistic regression in our analyses and clustered standard errors at the level of the participant. The unit of analysis is the evaluated profiles.

In addition to the profile variables listed in Table 5.1, our regression models include participants’ threat perceptions regarding Syrians and their level of support for integration. Threat perceptions were measured by taking the average of the nine variables examined in Part 3 of this report under the heading *Threat Perceptions Regarding Syrian Refugees* (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient: 0.96).⁷⁹ For measuring participants’ level of support for integration, we took the average of two variables: support for conditional citizenship and work permits (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient: 0.87). Both threat perceptions and support for integration were standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Our models also include a binary variable measuring participants’ willingness to live in a multicultural neighborhood. Finally, since preliminary analyses suggested an interaction between the profiles’ professional background and their age group, we included in our models interaction terms derived by multiplying the two variables.

The first striking finding of our analysis is that participants’ general attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethnic diversity have a much stronger influence on their profile assessments than do the personal qualities of refugees.

The first striking finding of our analysis is that participants’ general attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethnic diversity have a much stronger influence on their profile assessments than do the personal qualities of refugees. As Figure 5.1 shows, there is a strong relationship between support for integration policies and threat perceptions regarding Syrians on the one hand and approving resident permits for the profiled refugees on the other (independent of the refugee traits presented in the profiles). For participants who support integration the least, the probability of approving resident permits for the presented refugee profiles is estimated to be 9 percent. For participants who strongly support integration, the predicted probability is as high as

60.38 percent. A similar pattern applies to threat perceptions. Among the group of participants who feel the least threatened by Syrians, the predicted probability of approving resident permits is 62.38 percent. For those who feel the most threatened, it goes down to 10.21 percent.

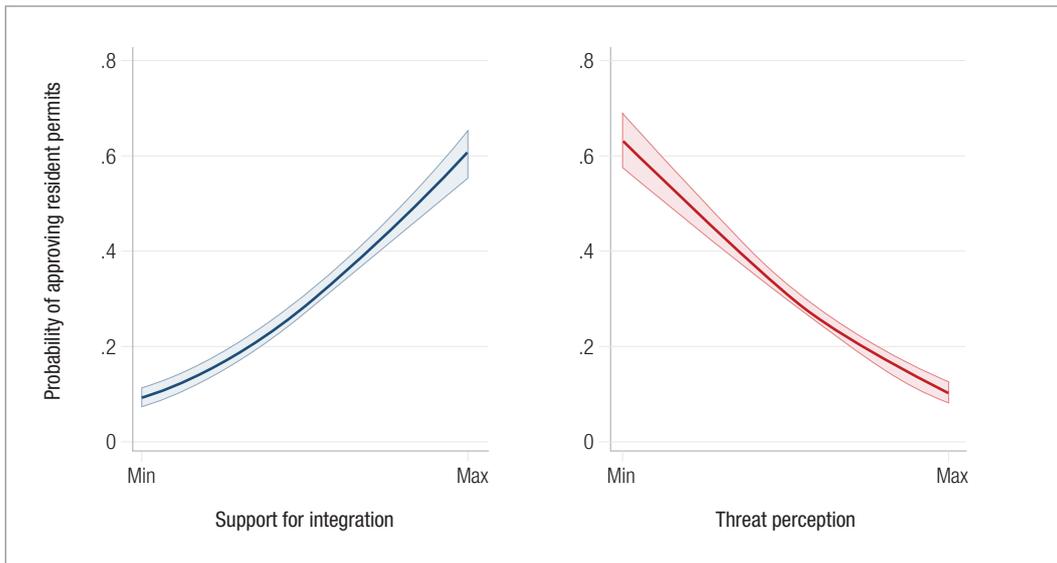


Figure 5.1 Support for Integration, Threat Perception, and Probability of Approving Resident Permits

Note: The shaded area shows the 95 percent confidence interval.

In addition to these two variables, a significant association is also found between attitudes toward ethnic diversity and approval of residence permits. Even when we control support for integration policies and threat perceptions, we see a more than 20-point difference between those who prefer to live in a multicultural neighborhood and those who do not in their predicted probability of approving resident permits for the refugee profiles. This probability is estimated to be 45.06 percent for the first group and 24.81 percent for the second group (Figure 5.2).

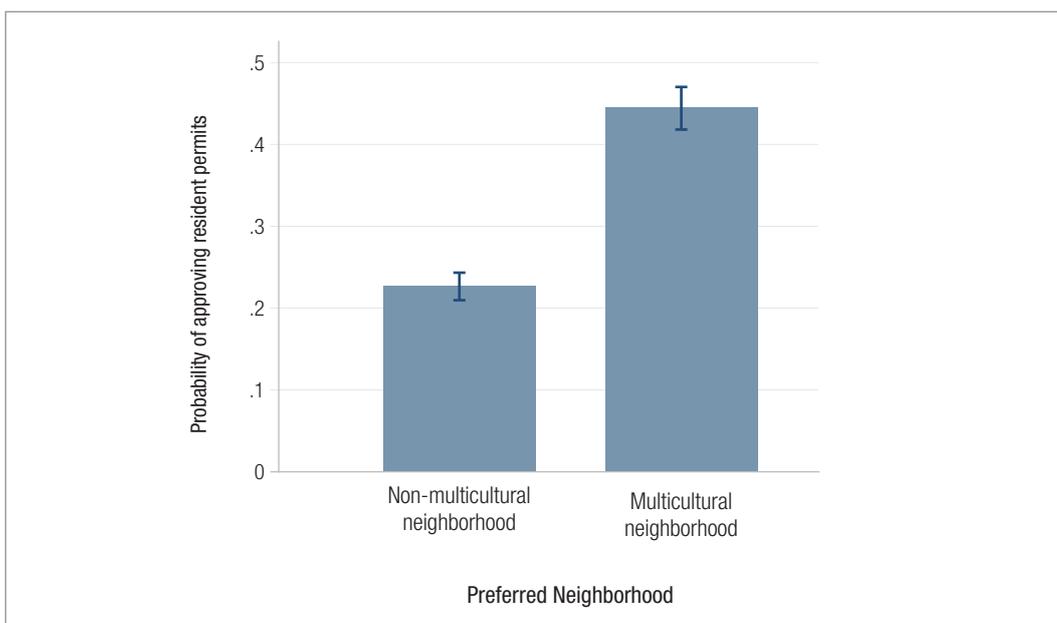


Figure 5.2 Neighborhood Preference and Probability of Approving Resident Permits

Note: The dark-colored rods show the 95 percent confidence intervals.

As these findings indicate, our experimental subjects were strongly influenced by their general attitudes toward Syrians and ethnic diversity when evaluating the profiles presented to them. By contrast, the personal characteristics of the refugees appear to have little effect on the probability that participants would approve their residence permits. The most important exception to this is the significance given to young refugees' professional backgrounds. As Figure 5.3 illustrates, the probability of approving residence permits for young working-class refugees is predicted to be 26.28 percent in the full sample. For young refugees with professional skills, the same probability increases to 31.62 percent.

The effect of refugees' professional background on the probability of approving resident permits is greater among some social segments. For instance, among Kurds, the probability of approval for a young working-class refugee is 33.90 percent, while for a young professional refugee it is much higher, 47.35 percent. Among Alevis, the figures are 27.11 percent and 40.59 percent, respectively. Moreover, the relationship between professional background and residence permit approval is stronger among non-college graduates. Among those with college degrees, the probability of approval is roughly equal for a young working-class refugee (33.59 percent) and a young professional refugee (34.80 percent). By contrast, among those with an elementary school degree or less, the probability of approval for a young working-class refugee (24.63 percent) is significantly lower than the probability of approval for a young professional refugee (33.61 percent).

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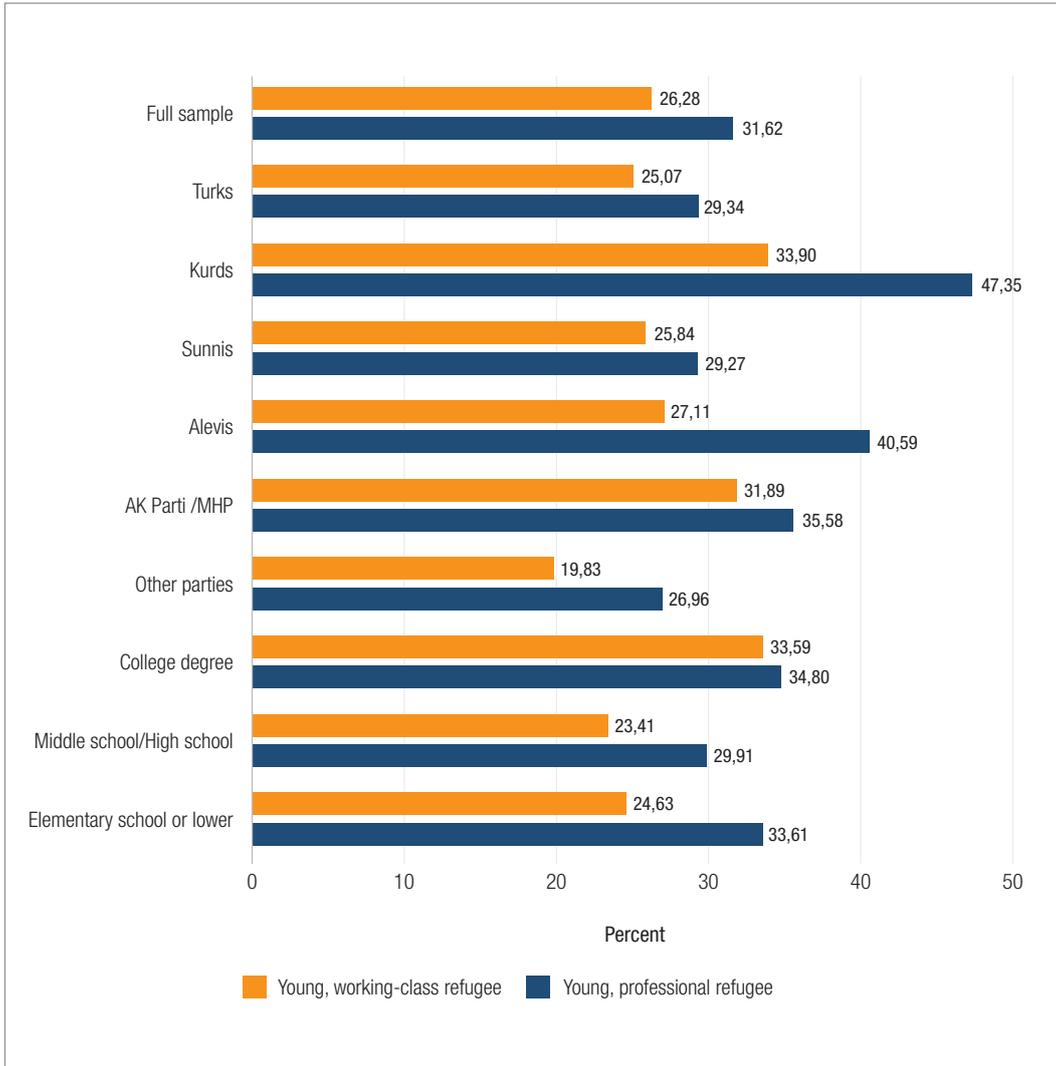


Figure 5.3 Professional Background and the Probability of Approving Resident Permits for Young Refugees

Fluency in Turkish is another factor that makes an impact, albeit limited, on how refugees are evaluated. Mastery of Turkish is particularly significant for nationalist voters. As Figure 5.4 shows, the probability of approval for a refugee not fluent in Turkish is 17.66 percent among MHP voters and 13.89 percent among İYİ Parti voters. For a refugee fluent in Turkish, on the other hand, the predicted probability of approval is 25.18 percent among MHP voters and 18.11 percent among İYİ Parti voters.

Fluency in Turkish is another factor that makes an impact, albeit limited, on how refugees are evaluated.

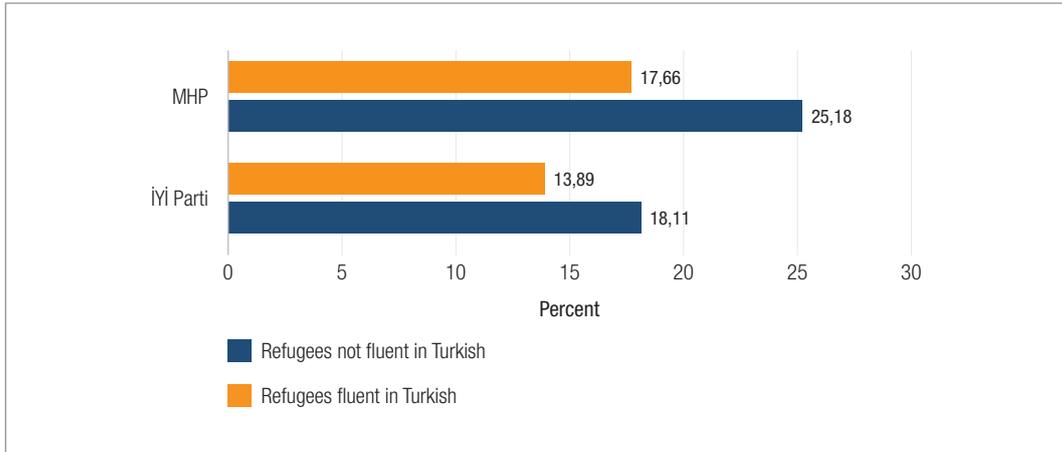


Figure 5.4 Fluency in Turkish and residence permit approval probability among nationalist voters

In summary, it can be argued that Istanbul residents tend to view Syrians as a homogeneous group, considering their individual characteristics to a limited extent when evaluating refugees. However, findings depicted in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show that refugees who have professional

These findings suggest that measures to maximize Syrian refugees' access to education and Turkish language courses can contribute to social integration.

skills or are fluent in Turkish tend to be preferred over others. The weight given to professional background when evaluating younger refugees is noteworthy, given that the majority of Syrians in Turkey are young.⁸⁰ These findings suggest that measures to maximize Syrian refugees' access to education and Turkish language courses can contribute to social integration.

6

CONCLUSION: MAIN FINDINGS AND POLICY PROPOSALS

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this study examined the perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees among Turkish citizens aged 18 and over who are residing in Istanbul. In Part 3, where we began presenting our empirical findings, we first demonstrated the cultural, emotional, and social distance between natives and refugees. We then analyzed the local population's policy preferences on several issues concerning Syrians. The main findings of Part 3 are as follows:

- Despite the existing religious and historical commonalities, the majority of Istanbul residents culturally marginalize Syrians. Only 32.10 percent of our survey respondents agree with the statement “Syrian refugees are culturally similar to us.” This ratio rises to 60.07 percent among participants who view Syrians as brothers-in-religion and falls to 5.08 percent among participants who disown this discourse of religious fraternity. It could thus be argued that shared religious identity plays a significant role in shaping natives’ perception of cultural distance from Syrian refugees. Nonetheless, shared religious identity is by itself not enough to prevent negative perceptions. Even among those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse, the majority defines Syrians as an economic burden and believes that refugees receive preferential treatment over Turkish citizens.

Even among those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse, the majority defines Syrians as an economic burden and believes that refugees receive preferential treatment over Turkish citizens.

- Istanbul residents tend to associate Syrians with both material and cultural threats. Concerns are widespread that Syrians are hurting natives’ employment chances, disrupting the demographic balance due to their high fertility rates, threatening the modern lifestyle in Turkey, making it difficult for locals to use public spaces and services, increasing rates of sexual assault against women and children, posing a terrorist risk to the country, and influ-

encing election results by voting. However, there are also significant differences in perceptions by party identity. AK Parti and HDP voters perceive Syrians as less of a threat than other voter groups. In contrast, CHP and İYİ Parti voters have above-average levels of threat perception in almost every issue.

- Istanbulites tend to hold highly negative feelings about international migrants in their city. In measurements we made with a “feeling thermometer” ranging from 0 (“Very negative, cold feeling”) to 10 (“Very positive, warm feeling”), the average feeling was 2.44 for Syrian refugees, 2.42 for Armenian immigrants, 2.85 for Uzbek immigrants, and 3.31 for African immigrants. These findings point to a very strong current of xenophobia in Istanbul, despite the city’s frequent portrayal as a “world city” or a “capital of cultures.”

These findings point to a very strong current of xenophobia in Istanbul, despite the city’s frequent portrayal as a “world city” or a “capital of cultures.”
- The majority of Istanbul residents are unwilling to develop social relationships with Syrian refugees. Only 21.70 percent say they would be comfortable with a Syrian family moving in their neighborhood. Similarly, those who say they would be open to having a Syrian refugee as a next-door neighbor or a friend constitute only 26.06 percent and 25.48 percent of the sample, respectively. It is HDP voters who are most open to establishing social relationships with Syrian refugees, while CHP and İYİ Parti voters are the least open.
- Only 35.49 percent believe that Ankara did the right thing by implementing an open door policy for refugees in the early years of the Syrian civil war. When we compare voter groups, we see that AK Parti, MHP, and HDP voters show higher rates of support for this policy than CHP and İYİ Parti voters. However, even among AK Parti supporters, less than 50 percent approve the open door policy.

Only 35.49 percent believe that Ankara did the right thing by implementing an open door policy for refugees in the early years of the Syrian civil war.
- When asked the question “Given that the armed conflict in Syria has not ceased, where do you think is the most appropriate place of residence for Syrian refugees currently in Turkey?”, the majority of our respondents picked one of the following two answers: “They should be resettled in safe zones that will be created inside Syrian borders” or “They should be resettled in refugee camps that will be established in Turkey.” Notably, only 18 percent selected “They should be free to choose their own place of residence” and roughly 20 percent selected “They should be deported without regard for their safety.” When we break down these responses by party preference, İYİ Parti voters appear to have the harshest attitudes, with 63 percent of them being in favor of deporting Syrians without regard to their safety.
- Our findings indicate that Istanbulites are relatively tolerant of the social services and assistance provided to Syrians. Proposals for supporting Syrian refugees to learn Turkish, giving Syrian children adequate education, ensuring that refugees benefit from general health screening and vaccination services, and providing social assistance to Syrian families in hardship receive more approval than disapproval. Even in the most controversial issue, that

of social assistance, less than 40 percent oppose the policy. That said, CHP and İYİ Parti voters show below-average levels of support for the policies in question.

Even in the most controversial issue, that of social assistance, less than 40 percent oppose the policy.

- Levels of support are very low for policies that go beyond the provision of social assistance and services and give refugees equal rights and status with locals. Only 27.69 percent agree with the statement “Syrians should be given work permits.” Similarly, only 25.96 percent agree with “extending citizenship to Syrians who have no criminal record and have the skills to practice professions that are in demand in Turkey.” When we break down levels of support by party preference, this policy, which we name conditional citizenship, is most fiercely opposed by MHP and İYİ Parti voters. These two groups are followed by CHP voters.

Levels of support are very low for policies that go beyond the provision of social assistance and services and give refugees equal rights and status with locals.

Part 4 of our research analyzed the factors shaping natives' views about Syrian refugees. To this end, we focused on two of the perceptions or attitudes examined in Part 3: average feeling toward Syrian refugees and support for conditional citizenship. The first of these was chosen because it points to the emotional distance between natives and refugees. The second, support for conditional citizenship, was chosen because it sheds light on the extent of public support for the principle of legal equality, which is vital to the integration of refugees. We addressed the factors affecting these two variables under seven headings: (1) demographic variables, (2) political discourses, (3) nationalism and xenophobia, (4) lifestyle concerns, (5) economic concerns, (6) concerns about security, and (7) intergroup contact. The main findings of Part 4 can be summarized as follows:

- There is no significant relationship between feelings about refugees and respondents' age, gender, education level, and monthly household income. However, college graduates and higher-income groups express stronger support for the conditional citizenship policy than groups with less education and lower income. Among those with a monthly household income above TRY7,500, support for conditional citizenship reaches 41.46 percent. That figure falls to 18.28 percent among those with a monthly household income below TRY2,500. Moreover, there is an 8.5-point difference between college graduates and those without a high school diploma. It can thus be claimed that socioeconomically better-off individuals are more open to the idea of extending citizenship to refugees satisfying certain criteria, even if they do not necessarily hold more positive feelings about Syrians.
- Kurdish participants hold warmer feelings toward Syrians than do Turkish participants, and the same is true for Alevi participants in comparison to Sunni participants. A similar finding is observed when we examine levels of support for conditional citizenship. However, ethnic

Among those with a monthly household income above TRY7,500, support for conditional citizenship reaches 41.46 percent. That figure falls to 18.28 percent among those with a monthly household income below TRY2,500.

and religious minorities, too, generally have negative feelings about Syrians. Moreover, both Kurds and Alevis have colder feelings toward Syrian refugees than toward other immigrant groups in Istanbul.

- There is a positive association between agreement with definitions of Syrians as “guests,” “the oppressed,” and “brothers-in-religion” on the one hand and feelings and attitudes toward refugees on the other. For instance, among those who agree with the statement “Syrian refugees are our brothers-in-religion,” the average feeling toward refugees is 3.54 out of 10. That average is only 1.01 among those who disagree with the statement. A similar pattern exists in levels of support for conditional citizenship. 40.74 percent of those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse support the policy, while only 9.67 percent of those who disagree do so. Multiple regression analyses have shown that this association remains significant even when we control for participants’ demographic characteristics and party preferences.
- Our analyses have also revealed a statistically and practically significant interaction between the religious brotherhood and economic burden discourses. The more a participant agrees with the economic burden discourse, the less the positive impact of religious brotherhood on that participant’s views about refugees. At the lowest level of support for the economic burden discourse, the difference in average feeling between those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse and those who disagree is as large as 4 points. That gap falls to 1.2 points at the highest level of support for the economic burden discourse. This finding points to a conflict between the identity and interests of those who are open to the idea of religious brotherhood.
- Our data shows a strong connection between nationalist tendencies and perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrians. Self-identified “Turkish nationalists” tend to have more negative feelings toward Syrians and lower rates of support for conditional citizenship compared with other participants. To give an example, only 11.23 percent of those who self-identify as Turkish nationalist support conditional citizenship, whereas that ratio rises to 33.35 percent in the rest of our sample. Similarly, those who are highly concerned that the percentage of Turks in the population is decreasing feel much colder toward Syrians and show very limited support for conditional citizenship.
- Generalized attitudes about ethnic outgroups have a significant impact on Istanbulites’ feelings about Syrians and also on their rates of support for conditional citizenship. Among those with relatively positive feelings about international migrants in general, the average feeling toward Syrians is comparatively warmer, at 4.55. In contrast, those with negative feelings about international migrants have an average feeling of 1.82 toward Syrian refugees. In addition, there are significant differences in attitudes toward Syrians between

At the lowest level of support for the economic burden discourse, the difference in average feeling between those who agree with the religious brotherhood discourse and those who disagree is as large as 4 points.

Self-identified “Turkish nationalists” tend to have more negative feelings toward Syrians and lower rates of support for conditional citizenship compared with other participants.

those who prefer to live in a multicultural neighborhood and those who do not. These results indicate that negative reactions against Syrian refugees in part reflect more generalized ethnocentric and xenophobic tendencies.

- In addition to generalized prejudice against ethnic outgroups, prejudices specifically targeting Arabs predict exclusionary attitudes toward Syrian refugees. When asked the degree to which they agreed with the statement “Arabs have always backstabbed us throughout our history,” 66.47 percent of our respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed were only 13.20 percent. Support for conditional citizenship was 21.02 percent in the first group and 42.39 percent in the second group.
- Lifestyle cleavages are another cultural factor shaping Istanbul residents’ views on Syrian refugees. In general, conservative social segments appear to be less hostile in their attitudes toward Syrian refugees. For instance, among Sunni participants who self-identify as religious conservative, the rate of support for conditional citizenship is nearly 40 percent, but this figure falls to 15.78 percent among the remaining Sunni participants. The relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward Syrians, on the other hand, displays a more complicated pattern. Moderately religious groups stand out as having the most negative feelings about Syrians. One reason for this is the concentration of self-identified “Turkish nationalists” in this group. For this social group, national identity is dominant over religious identity; therefore, commonality on the basis of Islam is inadequate as a motivation for solidarity with refugees.
- There is also a significant relationship between certain identity and lifestyle concerns common among secular social segments and attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Those who believe Turkey belongs in the modern Western world have colder feelings about Syrians and show less support for conditional citizenship than those who reject this idea. Similar findings are observed for those who are concerned about the possible abolition of laicism and restriction of women’s freedoms. For instance, support for conditional citizenship is 18.36 percent among those who are highly worried about the restriction of women’s freedoms, whereas it is 38.47 percent among those who say they are not worried.
- Attitudes toward Syrians refugees are not only related to matters of identity and cultural concerns. As concerns about the economic trajectory of the country increase, attitudes toward Syrian refugees become more negative. This relationship is particularly striking in support for conditional citizenship. Among those who have a low level of anxiety regarding the nation’s economic performance, 51.73 percent support conditional citizenship. This rate falls to 17.54 percent among those who are highly anxious.
- When we look at individuals’ concerns about their own household income, however, these appear to have a less significant effect on views about Syrian refugees. It could thus be

In general, conservative social segments appear to be less hostile in their attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

Those who believe Turkey belongs in the modern Western world have colder feelings about Syrians and show less support for conditional citizenship than those who reject this idea.

argued that concerns about the general economic situation play a more important role in shaping attitudes toward Syrians than personal economic anxieties. In other words, natives' negative reactions against Syrian refugees are driven less by personal interests than by the perception that an "outgroup" is exploiting "our" economic resources. Nonetheless, multiple regression analyses show that the relationship between personal financial anxiety and attitudes toward Syrians is stronger among AK Parti voters than among other voter groups.

It could thus be argued that concerns about the general economic situation play a more important role in shaping attitudes toward Syrians than personal economic anxieties

- Our findings indicate a strong connection between security-related concerns and attitudes and feelings toward Syrians. To give an example, the average feeling toward Syrian refugees is 1.41 among those who are highly anxious about a possible increase in larceny, homicide, and sexual assault rates, while it is 3.54 in the low-anxiety group. Similarly, those who are highly anxious about possible large-scale terrorist attacks have an average feeling of 1.26, while those who are lowly anxious have an average of 3.57. That said, the relationship is weaker between individuals' anxieties about their own personal security and their attitudes or feelings toward Syrians. In short, as with economic anxieties, the dominant factor is perceived group interests rather than personal well-being.
- Istanbulites frequently encounter Syrian refugees in their everyday lives. However, only 6.34 percent have established a close and regular relationship with a Syrian refugee beyond these superficial encounters. Among Kurdish citizens, this figure reaches 11.63 percent.
- There is no evidence to suggest that everyday encounters have a positive impact on individuals' attitudes toward Syrians. Quite the opposite, those who report frequently encountering Syrians in their workplace appear to have more exclusionary attitudes. However, individuals who have developed a close and regular relationship with a Syrian refugee tend to view Syrians more positively. For instance, among those who have established close ties with a refugee, support for conditional citizenship sits at 64.94 percent, while it is only 23.32 percent among the remaining respondents.

Istanbulites frequently encounter Syrian refugees in their everyday lives. However, only 6.34 percent have established a close and regular relationship with a Syrian refugee beyond these superficial encounters.

Most of the studies on native-born citizens' views about Syrians in Turkey treat refugees as a monolithic group, thereby overlooking the question of whether citizens discriminate among newcomers. Part 5 outlines a survey experiment we conducted to address this gap. As part of the experiment, we created 72 distinct Syrian refugee profiles, which differ in terms of gender, age group, marital status, professional background, and fluency in Turkish. We presented each respondent with six, randomly chosen profiles and asked them to indicate the degree to which they would approve granting residence permits to the selected refugees. We analyzed the results using binary logistic regression models in which respondents' general attitudes about Syrians and ethnic diversity were controlled for. The analyses yielded the following results:

- Respondents' general attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethnic diversity play a much stronger role in their profile assessments than do the personal characteristics of the refugees. Among participants with the lowest level of support for integration policies, the predicted probability of approving residence permits is 9 percent. The same probability rises to 60.38 percent for those with the highest level of support for integration. Similarly, among those who feel the least threatened by Syrians, the predicted probability of approving resident permits is 62.38 percent. For those who feel the most threatened, it drops to 10.21 percent.

Respondents' general attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethnic diversity play a much stronger role in their profile assessments than do the personal characteristics of the refugees.

- The personal characteristics of the refugees appear to have little effect on the probability that participants would approve their residence permits. The most important exception to this is the significance given to professional background in the evaluations of young refugees. In the full sample, the predicted probability of approving residence permits for young working-class refugees is 26.28 percent. For young refugees with professional skills, the same probability increases to 31.62 percent. The relationship between professional background and residence permit approval is stronger among Kurds, Alevis, and those without a college degree.

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- Another factor that plays a positive, though limited, role in the evaluation of refugees is fluency in Turkish. Nationalist voters in particular tend to prefer refugees who are fluent in Turkish over those who are not. The probability of approving a residence permit for a refugee who barely speaks Turkish is 17.66 percent among MHP voters and 13.89 percent among İYİ Parti voters. For refugees fluent in Turkish, these figures are 25.18 percent and 18.11 percent, respectively.

Nationalist voters in particular tend to prefer refugees who are fluent in Turkish over those who are not.

This research has examined Istanbul residents' perceptions of and attitudes toward Syrian refugees and attempted to shed light on the main factors shaping those perceptions and attitudes. In doing so, we have sought to contribute to initiatives aimed at improving social relations between natives and newcomers. Based on our research findings, we propose the following policy measures:

- Our study shows that Turkish citizens living in Istanbul have very limited social contact with Syrian refugees despite the heavy presence of international migrants in their city. For this reason, citizens' thoughts and impressions about Syrians are mostly

Our study shows that Turkish citizens living in Istanbul have very limited social contact with Syrian refugees despite the heavy presence of international migrants in their city. For this reason, citizens' thoughts and impressions about Syrians are mostly based on hearsay or social media rumors.

based on hearsay or social media rumors. Indeed, in our focus group discussions, we listened as our participants frequently repeated hearsay accounts about Syrians not paying taxes, using electricity and water free of charge, receiving salaries from the state, entering universities without examinations, or having priority in public hospitals. To fight these unfounded narratives and negative stereotypes about immigrants, we need a long-term public information campaign to be carried out cooperatively by the state and civil society organizations. The campaign should target both traditional media (television, newspapers, and radio) and the internet, and include intellectuals, artists, and athletes who can appeal to different social segments.

- In order to counter the tendency of viewing Syrians as a monolithic group and to present a more realistic portrait of them, this campaign should include life stories of refugees from various age, gender, education, and professional groups. Syrians should be depicted not as needy victims of a civil war, but as multidimensional individuals who try to hold on to life despite the catastrophe they have gone through, as individuals who have dreams like everybody else and fight to achieve those dreams.
- The public must be better informed about the civil war in Syria. The perspective that reduces the problem to a bipolar conflict between the regime and the people paves the way for the question of why the refugees did not remain in their country and join the war. For this reason, it should be emphasized that the civil war involves many domestic and foreign actors each with their own agendas; that the rebels, a significant proportion of whom are extremist groups, also fight among themselves; and that almost all armed factions have targeted civilians, albeit at different levels.
- Needless to say, discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes cannot be fought only by correcting misinformation. Discrimination and racism are social facts that are fueled by communal norms; they become naturalized unless reacted against. Therefore, the abovementioned public opinion campaign should also have a normative pillar, with people well-respected in society emphasizing that exclusionary discourses and behaviors toward different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups are unacceptable. While doing so, however, the authorities should avoid an accusatory language blaming the local population and instead opt for an approach that encourages empathy with refugees.
- There is an evident need for a comprehensive educational reform in Turkey. Chauvinistic elements should be removed from the curriculum and students should be encouraged to see cultural differences as a richness not a threat. More generally, the education system should be restructured to provide youngsters with the fundamental skills needed in the 21st century, including critical thinking and social media literacy.
- If the education system is one field where social norms become visible, penal law is another. The Turkish Criminal Code should be reformed to include a comprehensive regulation on hate crimes, and crimes against individuals or groups on the basis of religion, language, color, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation should not go unpunished.⁸¹

The perspective that reduces the problem to a bipolar conflict between the regime and the people paves the way for the question of why the refugees did not remain in their country and join the war.

- Both schools and municipal governments should organize educational, sports, artistic, and leisure activities that would increase the social contact between locals and Syrian refugees. These activities should particularly target the youth and prioritize durable, long-term organizations rather than one-time events. Such activities should be organized in ways that provide opportunities for equal and meaningful social relationships between natives and refugees and kept separate from social assistance initiatives.

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- All school-aged refugees should be integrated into the formal education system and maximum effort should be spent to ensure refugee children complete at least the first 8 years of the 12 years of compulsory education. Our research shows considerable public support for this policy even if that support is partially grounded in self-interested motivations. Moreover, the results of our survey experiment indicate that young refugees who are educated and have professional skills are more likely to be accepted in society. Therefore, including Syrian youth in formal education and providing them with the highest level of education possible is essential, not only to improve their living standards but also to facilitate social cohesion. Yet this schooling campaign should be careful not to have adverse effects on the local population. Thus, in areas where the number of Syrian students is high, new school buildings should be constructed to increase capacity, and existing schools should be better equipped to address the shortage of classroom space and teaching staff.

Including Syrian youth in formal education and providing them with the highest level of education possible is essential, not only to improve their living standards but also to facilitate social cohesion.
- In areas with a high concentration of refugees, public service capacities should also be increased. Investments in hospitals and public transportation are especially necessary to meet the increase in demand.
- The survey experiment we discuss in Part 5 shows that fluency in Turkish can increase the social acceptance of refugees. In line with this finding, the capacity of existing Turkish language courses should be expanded, and steps should be taken to facilitate adult refugees' access to these courses.

The capacity of existing Turkish language courses should be expanded, and steps should be taken to facilitate adult refugees' access to these courses.
- Municipal governments should be given increased responsibility in the governance of immigration to both properly meet refugees' basic needs and implement social integration projects that take local conditions into account. For this, local governments should be allocated extra resources proportional to international migrants living in their jurisdiction. Legal ambiguities concerning the use of public services by non-citizens should also be remedied.

To prevent the impression of a conflict of interest between different groups, social assistance programs should cover both Syrians and Turkish citizens who are in need.

- The Temporary Protection status should be amended to cover the right to work, and refugees should not need an extra permit in order to be employed. Existing regulations promote informal employment and create a ground for intensive labor exploitation. This situation pits citizens at the bottom of the labor market against impoverished refugees and thereby undermines social harmony. Although level of support for granting work permits to Syrians is currently very low, it is possible to increase this level by informing the public about the benefits of such a regulation.

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- To mitigate the political concerns of citizens who support opposition parties, the process of extending citizenship to refugees should be transparent and the number of refugees granted citizenship should be regularly shared with the public. That said, given the prevalence of negative reactions to giving refugees citizenship, intermediate solutions should be developed that are halfway between citizenship and temporary protection and that include residence and work permits.⁸²

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