Just Another Erdoğan: How Migrants Map Political Beliefs onto New Contexts[*]

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Abstract

An emerging body of literature is beginning to consider how immigrants from an authoritarian home country adapt and change upon moving to more a democratic context. Most researchers agree that immigrants' prior socialization under authoritarianism has long-term impacts on their political attitudes, party membership and participation. In other words, immigrants use their existing prior political beliefs and ideologies as heuristics for understanding their new political context. Building on this literature, I argue that immigrants who exit authoritarian countries may be categorized according to their level of opposition to the regime and associated state institutions. By conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews with Turkish citizens living the United States, I show that immigrants who oppose not just the regime in power but also the state are more easily able to translate their political beliefs to their new context and are more likely to recognize and identify authoritarian trends in their new country. Down the road, this affects immigrants' political behavior and level of participation, a key concern for both the home country and the hosting country.

Keywords: Migration, authoritarianism, democratic norms, political ideology, political resocialization, Turkish immigrants, interview methods

1 Introduction

As Western democracies accept immigrants from across the globe seeking a better way of life, they are increasingly faced with the question of how immigration can change the very political fabric of their countries. The political backlash against immigrants seen in the UK and USA in recent years (as well as many other European countries) is one manifestation of these anxieties. Indeed anti-immigration politicians and activists often point to the ways that immigrants disrupt or diverge from longstanding social customs and norms, including political ones.

The political backgrounds of immigrants entering Western democratic countries has not escaped such scrutiny. This attention can sometimes be positive, as was the case for Cuban who fled the Castro regime with the help of the US government. However, immigrants who come from countries perceived as especially different from the West are often critiqued within public discourse as being less desirable potential citizens due to their past political socialization and national affiliation. For example, Chinese immigrants are often stereotyped as being spies for the Chinese Communist Party. Similarly, Muslim immigrants' socio-religious practices may be perceived as incompatible with Western cultural norms. Finally, and most relevant to this paper, immigrants from authoritarian contexts may be criticized as bad citizens due to their inexperience with democracy, which relies on robust and active citizen participation to succeed.

The nexus between authoritarianism and immigration has rapidly become a key question within comparative politics and other disciplines. As globalization has made migration easier and cheaper, citizens of repressive regimes often choose simply to leave their countries in search of a better life abroad. Several scholars have noted that authoritarian regimes may encourage or even facilitate these immigration trends, as they weaken domestic opposition to the regime (Lueders 2024; Michel et al. 2023; Miller and Peters 2020; Dendere 2015).

When immigrants from authoritarian contexts leave their country of origin, they carry their beliefs about democracy and their orientations towards the state with them. Immigration is a defining life event that catalyzes a process of political resocialization in the new country (Sears and Valentino 1997; Brown 1981). Depending on the level to which they eventually become incorporated in their new country, these translated political beliefs may eventually motivate patterns of political participation. Though the literature has illuminated many trends in immigrant political participation, it has dedicated less space to the internal mental processes immigrants undergo as they adapt existing political beliefs to a new context and then translate their updated political beliefs into political action. This paper seeks to help bridge that gap by providing insight into the mental models common among immigrants who oppose authoritarian regimes in their home countries and are at least partially motivated to migrate by political circumstances.

2   Immigrant Political Resocialization

Existing work examining patterns of immigration from less democratic countries to more democratic countries has established that immigrants from authoritarian contexts need to "learn" democracy (Bilodeau 2004; Ciornei and Østergaard-Nielsen 2020). Upon arrival, they are less likely to express opinions about their new country and show lower levels of institutional trust when compared to the local population; however, over time they may achieve levels of engagement and trust similar to those that were born in a democratic context (Bilodeau 2004; Superti and Gidron 2022). This newer literature has debunked prior work that suggested that immigrants' socialization in an authoritarian context resulted in a more-or-less immutable "authoritarian personality" (Sanford et al. 1950).

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to theorize in this area. The literature has clearly established a link between the political beliefs an individual held while living in their home country and those they adopt in their new country (Preuhs 2020; Wals 2013; Finifter and Finifter 1989). Wals (2013) describes it particularly well, arguing that immigrants "use their pre-migration ideological predispositions...as a heuristic by which immigrants anchor and adjust their political views in the new host nation." This resocialization, translation, or anchoring process serves as the basis for this and other papers on immigrant ideology.

Scholars have begun to further narrow down the question of how pre-migration political socialization impacts immigrant political beliefs by looking at one particular set of pre-migration political experiences: authoritarianism. These scholars seek to answer the question: How does pre-migration exposure to authoritarianism impact immigrants' political beliefs, orientations, and behavior in their new countries. Trust has been a particular focus in this literature, as immigrants from authoritarian contexts often exhibit very low levels of institutional trust. Superti and Gidron (2022) have leveraged survey data from Israel to show that immigrants from less democratic contexts gradually "update" their trust levels as they spend more time in their new country, becoming more trusting of the new country's legal system and parliament. There have been similar findings for immigrants in Western Europe (Dinesen and Hooghe 2010). Unfortunately, the opposite finding appears to hold for Mexican immigrants living the US, who likely become more aware of discrimination over time and therefore lose trust in their new country (Michelson 2003; Wals and Rudolph 2019).

These contradictory findings illuminate an important gap in the literature surrounding the mechanisms by which immigrants adapt their political beliefs to a new context. This paper aims help fill this gap by answering two key questions: (1) How do immigrants translate their political beliefs onto their new contexts? (2) In what ways do the features of their pre-migration contexts, and especially authoritarianism, affect this translation process?

# 3 A Theory of Ex-Authoritarian Political Translation

The literature has established a clear relationship between immigrant integration and political involvement. As an immigrant's new society becomes more legible and they become more invested in its conditions, they naturally begin to participate more. This can be seen both on the individual level and on the generational level, as second and third generation immigrants are consistently more politically active than the generations before them. Additionally, it is clear that material factors, such as socioeconomic status, influence the degree to which any individual can participate politically. However, the fact remains that some immigrants enter their new country with a higher baseline interest in and knowledge of its political situation than others. I theorize that one key difference between these politically engaged immigrants and others is their ability to translate their previously held ideologies into their new context. I specify a new variable of interest, *authoritarian orientation*, to label the different ways that citizens respond ideologically to an authoritarian regime. This variable consists of two dimensions: regime support and state support. Citizens then fall into one of three potential categories based on how they land along each dimension. A visual depiction of this schema can be found in Table 1.

	Supports dictator/regime	Opposes dictator/regime
Opposes state institutions		Revolutionary opposition
Supports state institutions	Mainstream authoritarians	Mainstream opposition

Table 1: A Typology of Authoritarian Orientations

The regime support dimension can be visualized across the rows of Table 1. Based on this dimension we can divide citizens into "authoritarians" who support the ruling party and "opposition," who oppose it. Support for the state can be visualized down the columns of Table 1. Based on this dimension we can describe citizens as either "mainstream," if they support the state's core institutions, or "revolutionary," if they oppose them. The possibilities for the opposition are more nuanced than those for the authoritarians. Citizens who support the authoritarian regime in power also tend to support the state institutions, as these institutions have successfully brought the regime to power and are actively shaped by the regime once they are in power. Therefore it is difficult to conceptualize "revolutionary authoritarians," and I leave this cell black. On the other hand, the opposition may be divided into "mainstream opposition," who support the state's core institutions but oppose the regime, and "revolutionary opposition," who oppose both the state's institutions and the regime. Another way to conceptualize this can be seen in Figure 1. Citizens who fundamentally oppose the state and its institutions will also oppose the ruling authoritarian regime. On the other hand, not all citizens who oppose the regime will necessarily oppose the state. Opposition to the state can be thought of as a "deeper" level of opposition, not only against the

ruling power but against the social structures that allowed the regime to gain power.
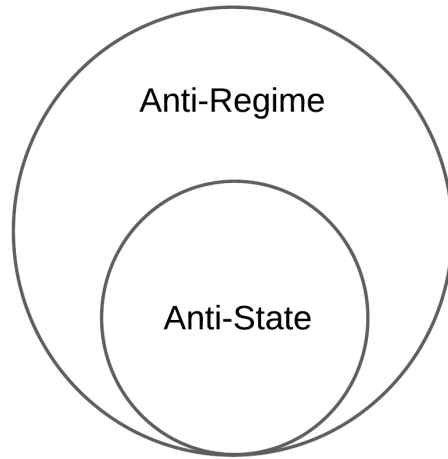
Figure 1: A subset of those who oppose the regime also fundamentally oppose the state. In other words, immigrants who hold anti-state ideologies are also anti-regime, but not vice versa.

All opposition supporters agree on certain core beliefs, outlined in Table 2. Most fundamentally, they see their country as undemocratic and recognize the regime as authoritarian in nature. Beyond this, mainstream opposition and revolutionary opposition beliefs begin to diverge. Mainstream opposition emphasize that the primary problem in the home country is the regime (or dictator), but that the state and its institutions are still legitimate in some way. Citizens who fall within this category will typically emphasize a particular political party or even a particular person as the cause of their country's problems. They will also express hope that if only this regime could be removed or changed, their country would be restored to a desirable state. In contrast, revolutionary opposition emphasize that the problems with the home country extend beyond just the regime to the state itself. Citizens who hold this type of ideology may express misgivings about their home country's institutions or history, and they will clearly indicate that removal of the current regime would not solve their country's problems. An overview of these opposition belief systems can be found in Table 2.

Authoritarian orientation functions as an important independent variable in understanding the immigrant experience. This is because immigrants who hold ideologies that transcend their home regime will more readily apply these to their new context than those whose ideologies are tied closely to their home regime. I argue that a citizen's authoritarian orientation can facilitate (or

Points of Agreement - All Opposition	
- Country has become undemocratic	
- Democracy must be restored	
- Transfer of power must occur	
Points of Disagreement	
Mainstream Opposition (anti-regime only)	**Revolutionary Opposition (anti-regime and anti-state)**
- Believe removal of dictator would restore democracy	- Believe removal of dictator not enough to restore democracy
- See military/police as independent of dictator	- See military/police as agents of dictator
- Believe country's institutions are democratic at core	- Believe country's institutions are undemocratic at core
- Likely part of the country's dominant ethnic group	- Likely part of a historically marginalized or persecuted group
- Less alienated from state	- More alienated from state
- More nationalistic	- Less nationalistic
- Less likely to identify with global activist movements, focusing instead on local activism	- More likely to identify with global activist movements, such as environmentalism, feminism, etc.

Table 2: Features of anti-state and anti-regime opposition beliefs

hinder) the translation of their political ideas onto a new context. When successful, this translation process can subsequently fuel political engagement and, ultimately, participation. More specifically, I outline the following hypothesis.

> Main Hypothesis: Revolutionary opposition will translate their political ideologies to their new political system more quickly and easily than all other authoritarian orientation types. This translation process will be evidenced by their increased ability to identify undemocratic trends within their new political system.

In the next section, I outline the relevant conceptual parameters for evaluating this theory.

4 Conceptual Clarifications

4.1 Who Is An Immigrant?

Fundamental to any theory around immigration is the question of who exactly is an immigrant. The boundaries of this concept have always been fuzzy, but they are increasingly more so in our globalized and interconnected world.

For the purposes of this research, I embrace the definition proposed by Hochschild et al. (2013), i.e.

"individuals or groups who have moved from their country of origin to a new country in which they plan to reside for a considerable period of time." This definition is broad enough to accommodate both those who attempt to leave their home country permanently and those who believe that their time in another country will be temporary. The latter is the case for many immigrants who leave authoritarian contexts; they may feel a strong desire to return to their home country should conditions improve at some point in the future.

Another important feature of this definition is that it emphasizes so-called first generation immigrants. These individuals make the decision to migrate for a variety of reasons, but for those leaving authoritarian contexts, political factors are generally at least part of the equation. They spend their childhood and are initially socialized in their countries of origin, but then find themselves - and their ideologies - transplanted into a new political system. This differentiates them from young children or second generation immigrants who are socialized almost entirely in their new country and may be relatively unfamiliar with the politics of their family's country of origin.

One challenge of examining the political engagement of first generation immigrants is that there may not be a lot of it, at least not that is immediately visible. First generation immigrants generally cannot immediately gain citizenship, so they cannot vote in most elections in their new country. They may be afraid to engage in contentious political activity out of fear that their Visa or Green Card may be revoked. Finally, they may be absorbed by the daily challenges of surviving in a new country and have little free time to engage with politics. I therefore echo several prior scholars' emphasis on "the practice of citizenship," i.e. broadening our understanding of citizenship beyond its definition as a legal category to include "cultural initiative or effective presence in the public sphere" (Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008; Balibar 1988). This more inclusive definition allows me to consider a variety of political engagement that may be less visible and less easy to measure. It is also a more suitable definition for our globalized world, in which political activity frequently transcends country borders.

4.2   What Does It Mean To "Translate" Political Beliefs?

Merriam-Webster defines "translate" as "to transfer or turn from one set of symbols into another." Implied in this definition is the search for an equivalent symbol as one switches from one context to another. Citizens who hold ideological political beliefs often see these beliefs as stemming from their core values and worldview. In other words, their political ideology aligns with their other socio-cultural beliefs, and if this were not the case or some inconsistency were illuminated, the individual would experience cognitive dissonance. When ideologically motivated citizens become immigrants, they bring their belief system with them to their new country and seek to find ways to maintain this belief system within their new context. It is this process that I term "translation."

Ideological translation must be distinguished from situations in which immigrants develop completely new political beliefs tailored to their new political system and grounded in their experiences in the new country. For example, an immigrant who faces dire working conditions and joins a political party that reaches out to immigrant workers is not translating their beliefs unless they had pre-existing views on workers' rights prior to migration. Likewise, an immigrant who joins an advocacy group pushing for improved relations between their new country and their country of origin is not translating their beliefs, but instead is choosing to adopt a new belief that they belief will materially benefit them. Translation only occurs when an immigrant attempts to adapt a *pre-existing* political belief or ideology in order to apply it to their new political context. An example of this might be an immigrant who has always supported women's rights in their country of origin and then seeks to understand US political parties in terms of their support for women's rights. As part of this process, the person will look for language, symbols, and patterns of inclusion that align with what they were used to in their country of origin.

5 Empirics

5.1 Population of Interest

Turkish immigrants[1] in the US present an excellent case study for testing my theory for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the majority of Turkish immigrants in the US oppose the current president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and espouse pro-democratic ideals. Indeed, there appears to be a sort of path dependence at play by which this particular type of Turk tends to immigrate to the US, while those who support Erdoğan are more likely to relocate to Europe, if they relocate at all. This relative uniformity of belief allows me to narrow my focus to the right-hand side of Table 2, i.e. the opposition. Based on results from expat voters in the 2023 Turkish presidential election, I expect that the population of Turkish immigrants living in the US looks something like Table 3. Approximately 20% of Turkish expat voters living in the US voted for Erdogan in the 2023 presidential election, with the remaining 80% supporting the opposition (Haddad 2023). I further estimate that this 80% is slightly skewed towards mainstream opposition, as this orientation is more straightforward and therefore probably more common.

	Supports dictator/regime	Opposes dictator/regime
Opposes state institutions		Revolutionary opposition: 30%
Supports state institutions	Mainstream authoritarians: 20%	Mainstream opposition: 50%

Table 3: Expected Distribution of Authoritarian Orientations Among Turkish Immigrants in the US

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[1]Though I use the phrase "Turkish immigrants" throughout this paper, a more accurate phrase would be "immigrants from Turkey" or "immigrants with Turkish citizenship." Among my participants, a portion identified as Kurdish and sought to clearly distinguish their ethnicity from their citizenship.

This distribution allows me to focus primarily on the vertical dimension of my variable of interest, i.e. support for state institutions. I anticipate that the majority of my participants will be either mainstream opposition or revolutionary opposition, and I will leverage this variance to answer my research questions of interest.

Second, Turkey represents a notable case of competitive authoritarianism, a form of authoritarianism that has become increasingly prevalent across the globe. Within competitive authoritarian regimes, elections occur, but they take place on an uneven playing field and the dominant party or politician engages in institutional capture over time. This makes the case of Turkish immigrants generalizable to many other authoritarian contexts experiencing similar declines in democracy. Additionally, it increases the likelihood that Turkish immigrants might be able to identify undemocratic trends in the US context, since any declines in democracy taking place in the US fall clearly within the framework of competitive authoritarianism.

Third, the dominant political cleavages in Turkey are significantly different than those in the US. More specifically, while the US is typically considered a left-right political spectrum, Turkey's dominant cleavage lies along an Islamism-secularism spectrum (Aydogan 2021). This means that immigrants will not be able to simply *transfer* their political beliefs from one context to another, but rather must *translate* these beliefs, adapting and modifying them to work in the US context.

Fourth, Turkish immigrants still comprise a relatively small - but growing - group of potential voters in the US, so the two major US political parties have not made significant efforts to reach out to this community. Some prominent Turkish immigrants have found a place in the Republican Party, such as Dr. Mehmet Oz, US President Trump's current nominee to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Others have gravitated towards the Democratic Party, such as Cenk Uygur, who worked as a political commentator on MSNBC and has run for office in California as a Democrat. Therefore there is no obvious, network-based political party allegiance among Turkish immigrants; both parties are seen as legitimate options by this immigrant community. Therefore an individual immigrant's beliefs and ideology (the subject of this research) plays a larger role in party affiliation.

Fifth and finally, Turkish immigrants living in the US are an understudied migrant group. This makes them inherently interesting and important as a means of contributing to our collective knowledge on the immigrant experience. Turkish immigrants diverge significantly from Latino/a immigrants, who have received the bulk of the attention within US-based immigration studies. These two groups differ in terms of geography, political system, religion, language, historical legacies, and numerous other socio-cultural elements. Additionally, while Turkish immigrants have received attention from European scholars due to their large presence in European countries and the hisotory of guest worker programs, the types of immigrants who choose to relocate to Europe

versus the US are notably different. As previously noted, Turkish immigrants who come to the US tend to be anti-Erdogan, secular, and pro-liberalism. In contrast, the majority of Turkish immigrants in Europe are quite religious and supportive of Erdogan and other Islamist movements. Therefore, Turks living in the US can provide unique insights into how different subsets of opposition supporters translate their political ideologies after moving abroad.

To summarize, Turkish immigrants present a case that is typical in some ways but atypical in others. They are an ideal case for testing my theory because they follow path dependent immigration trajectories and leave competitive authoritarian environments, which makes them similar to many other immigrant groups. They are unique in that they come from a country facing an Islamism-secularism cleavage and they have not been courted by any US political party. These features of the group may provide scope conditions for applying this theory to other groups, which will be further discussed in Section 7.

5.2 Data Collection

When I started my data collection process, the theory outlined in Section 3 was not fully fleshed out. I began with a core belief that there is variation in the degree to which immigrants are able to translate their pre-existing political beliefs and make comparisons between the political systems of their new country and country of origin. I designed a series of questions to help me uncover this variation, as well as some of the underlying processes and mechanisms that might explain it. These questions were organized to form an outline for conducting semi-structured interviews with Turkish immigrants. After the first couple of interviews, I was able to develop the theory outlined previously, and from that point forward I worked to refine and focus my questions to better capture my variables of interest. Therefore, these semi-structured interviews functioned as both a means of theory development and a means of providing preliminary evidence to support my proposed theory, an iterative process in line with Yom (2015).

5.2.1 Recruitment Procedures

To recruit participants, a bilingual ad was sent out to a listserv of previous study participants, as well as posted in several Facebook groups for Turks living in the US.[2] People who clicked on the ad were taken to a brief survey, meant to obtain informed consent, collect some basic information, and allow them to select an interview time. The only eligibility criterion was that the person hold Turkish citizenship and currently live in the United States.

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[2]AMERIKADA YASAYAN TURKLER, Amerika'daki Türk Firma Sahipleri, Turks in Greater Seattle Area

5.2.2 Interview Process

All interviews took place on Zoom from May to July 2024. The interviews were not recorded; however, the transcript feature of Zoom was used to create a written record of the conversation. Interviews were semi-structured, with a set questionnaire from which I would deviate slightly depending on my level of rapport with the participant and any unique information that was revealed as part of the interview process. The full interview questionnaire may be found in Appendix B. Sometimes my research assistant joined the interviews, but mostly I conducted them alone. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in Turkish, with occasional English words and sentences mixed in when convenient. Interviews generally lasted about one hour, including an oral discussion of informed consent that generally took up the first five to ten minutes. Participants were offered a digital gift card as an incentive for completing the interview, and the majority accepted it. Upon completion, any personally identifiable information was redacted from the interview transcripts, and they were saved for analysis.

5.2.3 Sample Characteristics

Three of the ten participants were women. Because men are significantly more likely to immigrate in the Middle Eastern context, this distribution is not necessarily cause for alarm. All participants except two held a terminal degree (Masters or PhD). In many cases, they had pursued graduate school in the US as a means of facilitating immigration and integration into the US economy and society, a common trend for Turkish immigrants. Nonetheless these ten participants were likely more highly educated than the average Turkish immigrant living in the US, especially if undocumented immigrants are included. The majority of participants after Erdogan was first elected PM in 2003. All participants were employed or were business owners and were living in the US either as green card holders or as naturalized citizens.

5.2.4 Coding Process

Interview transcripts were subjected to a qualitative coding process with the primary goal being to identify my IV (authoritarian orientation) and DV (ability to translate political beliefs). The coding scheme was developed iteratively as I read through the interview transcripts and reflected on trends that emerged. Redacted interview transcripts were loaded into NVIVO and coded for variables of interest using the software's workflow. Coding was hierarchical and non-exclusive, meaning that a particular statement could receive multiple different labels, if it represented multiple concepts of interest. The full coding scheme can be found in Appendix C.

5.3 Measuring Authoritarian Orientations

To measure authoritarian orientations, I coded transcripts from 10 semi-structured interviews with Turkish immigrants living in the US. The question that was most useful for categorizing was generally

some version of "What are the top three challenges your home country is facing right now?" (See Appendix B Q8.) It was relatively straightforward to separate participants between the mainstream opposition and revolutionary opposition categories based on their answers to this this question and our follow-up discussion.

Mainstream opposition participants were characterized by a narrow focus on Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AK Party (Turkey's ruling party) as the source of Turkey's problems. For example, when asked about Turkey's top three problems as a country, one participant responded,

> "One word: Erdoğan. I mean, you can sum up all [of Turkey's] problems like this. Erdoğan."[3]

This participant went on to predict that Erdogan might lose the next election, arguing,

> "Fortunately I am sure that we will not become Iran, for example. Because secularism and democracy are still strong in Turkey ."[4]

Another participant explained that, in their view, Erdogan is the biggest problem in Turkey because he has been in power too long. They went on to say that the problem is not the AK Party, but rather Erdogan specifically, the man.[5]

These mainstream opposition participants clearly differentiated the regime from the state, arguing that there were still some positive institutional features of the Turkish state that had endured in spite of authoritarianism.

In contrast to this limited critique of the Turkish political situation, revolutionary opposition participants identified broader anti-democratic or unjust trends within core Turkish state institutions. Participants in this category explicitly stated that Turkey's problems predate and/or surpass Erdoğan. For example, one participant joked,

> "Like if we could get Erdoğan tomorrow and lose him in a forest, it wouldn't be a solution, but if those who are running against him could start to win I think it would go better...There's Tayyip. And then there's the people who choose Tayyip. Say that Tayyip were to go, like, he were pushed out and replaced. Today, tomorrow, [the people] would vote for someone similar to Tayyip."[6]

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[3]"Tek kelime: Erdoğan. Yani bütün sorunlar bu şekilde özetlenebilir. Erdoğan."

[4]"Biz mesela İran olmayacağımıza ben neyse ki eminim. Çünkü Türkiye'deki sekülerizm ve demokrasi halen güçlüymüş."

[5]No Turkish transcript available for this interview due to technical issues.

[6]"Hani Erdoğan aldık yarın, yarın Erdoğan ormanda kayboldu, bir çözüm değil ama karşısındakiler kazanmaya başlarsa daha iyiye gideceğini düşünüyorum...Tayyip var. Ve Tayyibi seçen insanlar var. Tayyibi çekip sahibinin yerini hani Tayyip gitti desek? Bugün yarın onun yerine gelen insan da Tayyibe benzer birine oy verecekler."

A Kurdish participant I interviewed expressed similar views with respect to the last Turkish presidential election, saying,

> "We voted for him [Kılıçdaroğlu, the opposition candidate]. My only aim was to shake things up a little. It was to change the status quo in Turkey a little. Kılıçdaroğlu was not going to be better. Never! If Kılıçdaroğlu came, some powers would have passed into Kılıçdaroğlu's hands. Another set of powers would still be in Erdoğan's. The state would still perhaps be closer to Erdoğan's mentality. But at least then we wouldn't be stuck in the troubles of the status quo."[7]

These participants indicated that removing Erdogan from power would not be enough to solve Turkey's political problems, and that a broader change would need to take place in Turkish society to effectively combat authoritarianism.

5.4 Measuring Ideological Translation

To measure participants' ability to translate ideology and identify undemocratic trends in the US, I coded the interview transcripts based on . The question that was most useful for categorizing was generally some version of "What are the top three challenges your home country is facing right now?" (See Appendix B Q8.) When discussing US politics, participants displayed varying abilities to translate their political views related to Turkey to the US context. These abilities roughly aligned with the type of ideology they expressed.

Participants classified as mainstream opposition generally did not see noticeable similarities between the US and Turkish political systems. They also did not see Trump as analogous to Erdogan in terms of the threat he might pose to democracy. One participant categorized as mainstream opposition explained,

> "Here, you do not clearly see a dictatorship or something like that in Turkey. The reason is, well, every term a different party comes to power. That's the reason actually."[8]

The participant who expressed that "Erdogan, the man" is the biggest problem in Turkey was supportive of Trump. When I asked about Trump, he put two thumbs up in approval and said,

> "You don't get to that place in life [Trump's wealth, power] without doing something

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[7]Ona oy verdik. Tek amacım sadece bunun biraz çalkalanması. Türkiye'deki statükonun biraz değişmesiydi hani. Kılıçdaroğlu gelecek daha iyi olacak değildi. Asla! Kılıçdaroğlu gelse birtakım güçler Kılıçdaroğlu'nun eline geçmiş olacaktı. Diğer bir takım güçler yine Erdoğan'da olacaktı. Yine devlet belki Erdoğan'ın aklına daha yakın olacaktı. Ama en azından sonra dert statük oturmayacağız.

[8]"Burada, mesela Türkiye'deki gibi çok net bir şekilde diktatörlüğü veya şeyi görmüyorsun. Sebebi, şey, her dönem farklı bir parti başa geçiyor. Bunun sebebi bu aslında."

right."[9]

Though these participants had developed opinions about US politics, they demonstrated some ignorance of the ways in which US democracy might come under threat, in spite of their experiences with authoritarianism in Turkey.

In contrast, participants classified as revolutionary opposition showed a clear ability to identify authoritarian trends in the US and often saw Trump as a threat to US democracy. For example, one of the previously quoted participants explained,

> "I think, well, from my perspective, Trump and Erdoğan are not very different people. Well, as I said before, I think Trump is a big problem in America too, but I think the same problem will happen if you remove Trump and replace him with someone else."[10]

Likewise, the Kurdish participant quoted earlier explained,

> "I think I made a connection between the process by which Trump was chosen, the process by which Trump became president, the experiences in America, and the past experiences in Turkey."[11]

6   Results

The following results are not meant to comprise a conclusive test of my theory, but rather some preliminary evidence that supports the relationships outlined in Section 3. In Section 8 I outline a plan to test these relationships more robustly. That being said, I believe that these results provide a compelling path forward that aligns with my proposed hypotheses.

The first result worth noting is that the distribution of interview participants (Table 4) looks more or less similar to the expectations outlined in Table 3. Recall that the majority of Turkish immigrants in the US are anti-Erdogan, and this trend was clear within my sample, which was entirely comprised of opposition members. Unlike my previous prediction, my sample contained equal numbers of mainstream opposition and revolutionary opposition. This may reflect that fact that my sample was likely overeducated, compared to the general Turkish immigrant population. This is somewhat natural given that more highly educated individuals are more likely to desire to participant in research studies. I will further discuss the role of education in the next subsection.

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[9]No Turkish transcript available for this interview due to technical issues.

[10]"Bence hani benim bakış açıma göre Trump ve Erdoğan birbirinden çok farklı insanlar değiller hani. Ee, daha önce dediğim gibi, Amerika'da da Trump'ın büyük bir sorun olduğunu düşünüyorum ama Trump'ı çekip yerine kim koysan aynı sorunun olacağını düşünüyorum."

[11]"Bence Trump'ın seçildiği süreçte Trump'ın başkan olduğu süreçte Amerika'da yaşananlarla Türkiye'de geçmişte yaşananlar arasında biraz bağ kurdum."

	Supports dictator/regime Supports Erdogan	Opposes dictator/regime Opposes Erdogan
Opposes state institutions Critiques Turkish state		5
Supports state institutions Defends Turkish state	0	5

Table 4: Distribution of Participants Across Authoritarian Orientations

In Table 5 I show a crosstab between authoritarian orientation (IV) and ideological translation (DV). This table functions as the primary evidence supporting my hypothesis that revolutionary opposition will more easily translate their ideologies from the Turkish context to the US context. A greater number of interviews would need to be conducted and coded to test for a statistically significant difference between revolutionary opposition and mainstream opposition, but it is promising that these preliminary descriptive data points align with expectations.

	Sees undemocratic trends in US	Sees US as completely democratic
Revolutionary opposition	3	2
Mainstream opposition	2	3

Table 5: Crosstab Between Authoritarian Orientations and Critiques of US Democracy

6.1 The Role of Education

The importance of education, especially political education, cannot be underestimated for my population of interest. As previously mentioned, it is likely that my sample has a higher average education level than the full population of Turkish immigrants living in the US, especially if one includes undocumented immigrants. This is to be expected given that more educated individuals are more likely to have time to participate in an interview and may have more familiarity and comfort with research studies. The topic of the interviews, which was mentioned in the recruitment ad, may also have attracted more educated participants. It seems probably that more educated citizens are more likely to adopt revolutionary opposition orientations, given the deeper level of critique that is involved in this viewpoint. And indeed the descriptive statistics support this idea. Table 6 shows that PhD holders were slightly more likely to be categorized as revolutionary opposition, and the one participant who had only a high school diploma fell into the mainstream opposition category. Again, while preliminary, these statistics suggest that controlling for education will be extremely important in any future attempts to measure immigrants' authoritarian orientations.

	PhD	Masters	Bachelors	High School
Revolutionary opposition	2	2	1	0
Mainstream opposition	1	3	0	1

Table 6: Crosstab Between Authoritarian Orientations and Highest Level of Education

7   Scope Conditions

The insights from my interviews reflect the perspectives of a specific subset of immigrants. I cannot claim they are representative of Turkish immigrants in the US; at least one important group, the Gülenists, are not currently represented within my participants. There may be other groups that have also been omitted. Furthermore, Turkish immigrants in the US are not representative of Turkish immigrants globally. Turkish immigrants in Europe tend to be much more conservative and supportive of Erdogan. Nonetheless, I believe that the insights from this subset of immigrants can still offer some unique insights into the general translation process that immigrants undertake when they exit authoritarianism. These insights will be especially relevant to immigrants based in the US who leave their country of origin at least partly because of political conditions.

It is important to note that the Turkish context represents a particular type of authoritarianism: electoral and competitive authoritarianism. The current regime may also be characterized as personalistic and/or single-party hegemonic, depending on whether one sees Erdogan or the AK Party as the dominant force. As a country, Turkey maintains relations with other countries, including the West, and holds competitive elections, though they may take place on an uneven playing field. These features allow Turkish citizens to distinguish between the regime in power and the state that pre-exists the regime and sometimes acts separately from it. In contexts where these two features are less separable, or where the form of authoritarianism is closed, this theory may not apply. Similarly, it may not apply in authoritarian contexts where participation is forced and competition is less pronounced, such as the former Soviet Union.

Another key feature of the immigrants with whom I spoke is that all of them followed sanctioned migration processes. These included Visa sponsorship by a job, Visa sponsorship by an educational institution, and winning the Visa diversity lottery. None of my participants entered the US without documentation, which limits the generalizability of this work to the vast number of immigrants who do not have the privilege to follow the sanctioned path. Additionally, most of the immigrants with whom I spoke were quite educated, which likely facilitated the migration process. Their education level is reflected in their answers to my questions, answers which were often quite nuanced and complex. A less educated immigrant - or perhaps one who was still working to learn English - likely would not have been able to speak in such a coherent manner about US politics. This therefore limits

the generalizability of my findings to immigrants who are educated to at least the high school level and speak the language of their new country at some minimum level, likely well enough to read a simple news article.

Finally, this theory only offers insights into how immigrants who oppose their home regimes translate their political beliefs. Though many immigrants from authoritarian politics are at least partly motivated to relocate by political concerns, it is conceivable that there are some immigrant groups who move entirely for non-political reasons. This may be especially true for authoritarian contexts that are economically strong, such as Singapore or the U.A.E. This theory of political translation has limited generalizability for such pro-regime immigrants.

8   Next Steps

A key next step is to obtain a large enough sample of immigrants to conduct a functional hypothesis test. This would likely require transitioning from semi-structured interview format to survey format, and targeted questions to measure authoritarian orientation and ideological translation must be developed and validated. A larger sample would allow me to make more convincing statements about the variation in key variables and the relationships that may drive this variation.

While a one-time survey could facilitate preliminary hypothesis testing, the ideal research design would track immigrants political beliefs longitudinally over time, starting before immigration and continuing for several years after. Immigrant political resocialization is likely a lifelong process, and impactful political events can always nudge an individual ideologically. Understanding the degree to which this takes place over time could provide insight into how political learning and adaptation takes place for non-immigrant populations as well.

As a next step, in spring of 2025 I will launch a longitudinal survey that follows participants in the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, popularly known as the Green Card Lottery. I will follow both the winners and losers of the lottery over time to identify variation in their political beliefs over time. This survey research will ultimately result in a longitudinal dataset with a randomized component, the first of its kind in immigration research.[12] It will allow me to test my theory more systematically and will also provide a more granular picture of the reasons why citizens may gravitate towards revolutionary opposition rather than mainstream opposition.

9   Conclusion

This paper has articulated a new theory of immigrant ideological translation. In doing so it contributes to existing work on immigrant political incorporation, focusing on internal mental

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[12]For a similar study conducted by economists, see Gibson et al. (2018).

models rather than observable political behaviors. These mental models are important to understand, because they are influential long before a immigrant can participate politically in their new society. They also likely help determine what political positions an immigrant will eventually support. Using interviews with a subset of Turkish immigrants living in the US, I identify two authoritarian orientations present among participants: mainstream opposition and revolutionary opposition. I further theorize that the latter group will more easily translate their beliefs onto their new political context. This prediction is reflected in the answers provided by immigrants to questions about US politics in their interviews, which provides preliminary evidence for my theory.

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Appendices

A Recruitment Advertisement Used Online

Advertisements used to recruit study participants are displayed in Figures A1 and A2.

Figure A1: Turkish version

Figure A2: English version

B Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire

B.1 English Version

1. Tell me the story of how you got here. Describe the process you went through to come to the US.

1a. Where are you currently living?

1b. Where did you live in Turkey before immigrating?

1c. Did you work on learning a second language before relocating?

1d. Did you need to apply for a Visa?

1e. Were you able to leave your country the first time you tried, or did it take multiple attempts?

1f. Were you concerned about being prohibited from leaving your country by the government?

2. What do you do for work? Is your job permanent?

3. What things are easy and difficult about living in this country?

3a. What was something you were surprised by when you first moved here (either positive or negative)?

3b. What is something you regularly complain about?

3c. What is something you are grateful for that relates to living here?

4. Has living in the US improved your socio-economic status (quality of life)? If so, how?

5. Do you think Turks living in the US are similar to other immigrant groups in the US, or are Turks distinct somehow? Explain.

6. Do you think Turks living in the US are similar to Turks living abroad in countries other than the US, or are American-Turks distinct somehow? Explain.

7. Let's talk more about the reasons you decided to leave your country and come to the US. What are some of the "push factors" and "pull factors" that you experienced?

7a. At what age did you learn English?

7b. Were there job opportunities that you researched?

7c. Did you have friends or family already living in certain countries abroad?

7d. Are you a member of any minority group in Turkey?

8. What are the top three challenges your home country is facing right now? Do any of these affect you personally?

9. You mentioned ISSUE. Do you continue to engage with this issue for your home country? Does this issue still affect your friends and family?

10. With regard to ISSUE, do you see any similarities between the US and your home country?

11. How does the political system in the US compare to the political system in Turkey?

12. Have your political beliefs changed at all after moving abroad?

13. Are there any US political figures who you admire? Why?

14. Is there a political movement or cause here in the US that you support?

15. Do you consider yourself or your family to be politically active? Why or why not?

16. How active are you in US politics? Do you…

16a. read articles or watch shows from American news outlets?

16b. sign petitions?

16c. post or share political content on social media?

16d. talk about politics with family, friends, or neighbors?

16e. attend protests or demonstrations? (For example, have you attended any protests related to the war in Gaza?)

16f. [if citizen] vote?

16g. Anything else?

17. What are the top three challenges the US is facing right now? Do any of these affect you personally?

18. Have you ever faced any negative consequences for being politically active?

18a. Have you ever had an interaction with the police related to your political activity?

18b. Has an individual or group who disagreed with you ever attacked you, either verbally or physically?

19. In what ways do you stay connected with your home country?

19a. Do you speak your native language with others in your community?

19b. Does your work relate to your home country?

19c. Do you maintain relationships with people in your home country?

19d. Do you participate politically in your home country's politics? In what ways?

20. Do you plan to return to Turkey in the future? Why or why not?

20a. What would need to change for you to return to Turkey?

21. What factors do you think allowed you to immigrate successfully? Comparing yourself to others you know who have been unable to immigrate, what made a difference in your case?

22. Referrals: Do you know anyone else who might be interested in talking with me about these topics?

B.2 Turkish Version

1. ABD'ye nasıl taşındığınızı anlatın. Taşınma sürecinden bahsedin.

1a. ABD'de nerede yaşıyorsunuz?

1b. Türkiye'deyken nerede yaşıyordunuz?

1c. Taşınmadan önce ikinci bir dil öğrendiniz mi?

1d. Vize başvurusu yaptınız mı?

1e. İlk denemenizde taşınabildiniz mi?

1f. Taşınmanızın hükümet tarafından engellenmesinden korktunuz mu?

2. İş için ne yapıyorsunuz? Kalıcı bir işiniz var mı?

3. Bu ülkede yaşamanın kolay ve zor yanları neler?

3a. Buraya ilk taşındığınızda sizi şaşırtan şeyler nelerdi (olumlu veya olumsuz)?

3b. Hakkında düzenli olarak şikayet ettiğiniz bir şey nedir?

3c. Burada yaşamaktan memnun olduğunuz bir şey nedir?

4. ABD'de yaşamak sosyoekonomik statünüzü yükseltti mi (yaşam kalitesi)? Eğer evetse, nasıl?

5. ABD'de yaşayan Türkler ve ABD'de yaşayan diğer göçmen gruplar arasındaki benzerlikler ve farklılıklar neler? Açıklayınız.

6. ABD'de yaşayan Türkler ve başka ülkelerde yaşayan Türkler arasındaki benzerlikler ve farklılıklar neler? Açıklayınız.

7. ABD'ye taşınmak istemenizin sebeplerinden bahsedin. Buna sebep olan "itici faktörler" ve "çekici faktörler" nelerdi?

7a. İngilizce öğrendiğinizde kaç yaşındaydınız?

7b. Araştırdığınız iş fırsatları var mıydı?

7c. Yurt dışında belli ülkelerde yaşayan aileniz veya arkadaşlarınız var mıydı?

7d. Türkiye'de herhangi bir azınlık gruba mensup musunuz?

8. Şu anda ülkenizdeki en önemli sorunlar sizce neler? Bu sorunlar sizi etkiliyor mu?

9. SORUN'dan bahsettiniz. Bu sorunla ilgili yaptığınız bir şey var mı? Bu sorun ailenizi ve arkadaşlarınızı etkiliyor mu?

10. ABD ve ülkeniz arasında SORUNUN konusunda benzerlikler var mı?

11. ABD'deki ve Türkiye'deki siyasi sistemler arasındaki benzerlikler ve farklılıklar neler?

12. Yurtdışına taşındıktan sonra siyasi görüşleriniz değişti mi?

13. ABD'de beğendiğiniz herhangi bir siyasi figür var mı? Neden?

14. ABD'de desteklediğiniz siyasi bir hareket var mı?

15. Kendinizi veya ailenizi siyasette aktif olarak tanımlar mıydınız? Neden?

16. ABD siyasetinde ne kadar aktifsiniz? Örnek olarak…

16a. Haber okumak

16b. İmza kampanyalarına katılmak

16c. Sosyal medyada siyasi içerik paylaşmak

16d. Çevrenizdeki insanlarla siyaset hakkında konuşmak

16e. Protestolara katılmak (Örnek olarak, Gazze'yle ilgili protestolara katıldınız mı?)

16f. [Eğer vatandaşsanız] Oy vermek

16g. Diğer?

17. Şu anda ABD'deki en önemli sorunlar sizce neler? Bu sorunlar sizi etkiliyor mu?

18. Siyasi olarak aktif olduğunuz için sorun yaşadınız mı?

18a. Hiç polisle siyasi konularda sorun yaşadınız mı?

18b. Bir kişi veya grup tarafından sözel veya fiziksel saldırıya uğradınız mı?

19. Ülkenizle olan bağlantınızı nasıl sürdürüyorsunuz?

19a. Çevrenizdeki kişilerle anadilinizi konuşuyor musunuz?

19b. Yaptığınız iş ülkenizle bağlantılı mı?

19c. Ülkenizdeki insanlarla olan ilişkilerinizi sürdürüyor musunuz?

19d. Ülkenizin siyasetine katılıyor musunuz?

20. Gelecekte Türkiye'ye dönmeyi planlıyor musunuz? Neden?

20a. Türkiye'ye dönmeniz için neyin değişmesi gerekir?

21. Göç etmekte başarılı olmanızı sağlayan faktörler neler? Kendinizi göç edemeyen tanıdıklarınızla karşılaştırın. Aradaki farklar neler?

22. Bu konular hakkında benimle konuşmak isteyebilecek başka birini tanıyor musunuz?

C   Coding Scheme for Semi-Structured Interviews

- Overarching Category: Demographics
  - Code: Assimilation = discussions of incorporation into US society, the degree to which they stay connected to Turkey, citizenship status
  - Code: Ethnicity = discussions of ethnic identity or background

- Code: Family = discussions of family, especially spouses, children, parents, and siblings
- Code: Locations = discussions of locations lived and worked, both in Turkey and in the US, as well as characterizations and descriptions of those locations
- Code: Religion = discussions of religious identity or practice, discussions of religious proselytizing
- Code: Work / Education / SES = discussions of work, education, and socioeconomic status, both before and after migration
- Overarching Category: Political Beliefs
  - Code: Turkey = beliefs and opinions regarding Turkey's political system and governance
  - Code: US = beliefs and opinions regarding the US' political system and governance
  - Code: Universal Democratic Principles = statements about democratic norms that transcend country borders, i.e. "This is how democracy should be"
- Overarching Category: Repression
  - Code: Personal = repression directly experienced by the participant
  - Code: Hearsay = repression that the participant heard about from family, friends, or the news
- Overarching Category: Ideologies
  - Code: Anti-Regime = see Sections 3 and 6
  - Code: Anti-State = see Sections 3 and 6
  - Code: Global = see Sections 3 and 6