



**Sociology of Power in
Migration Governance:
Proposing a New Analytical
Framework Using Turkey
as a Case Study**

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**SOCIOLOGY OF POWER IN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE:
PROPOSING A NEW ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK USING TURKEY AS A CASE STUDY**

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Abstract

This paper applies the Sociology of Power framework to Turkey's migration governance from 2000 to 2024. Turkey's geographic position makes it a pivotal actor in international migration: it hosts the world's largest Syrian refugee population and serves as a key transit country for migrants seeking entry into Europe. By applying Sociology of Power, this paper seeks to deepen our understanding of the dynamics and actors shaping migration policies. Prior scholarship has exposed the instrumentalisation of migration in domestic and foreign policy, yet tends to treat the state as a unitary actor, overlooking intra-state power dynamics. This paper argues that Sociology of Power fills this gap by illuminating the competition among elites and the neoliberal accumulation of power that underlies migration governance. The findings demonstrate the framework's utility as a complementary analytical tool, whilst acknowledging its limitations regarding assumptions about actor behaviour and the depth of analysis required.

Keywords

Sociology of Power, Turkey, elites, neoliberalism, migration governance, Syrian refugees, transit migration.

Introduction

In December 1999, Turkey was officially declared a candidate for EU membership. This moment, combined with the formation of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2001, set Turkey on a complex path: split between EU accession ambitions and regional leadership in the Middle East, Turkey's migration policies reflect President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's attempts to balance these competing interests. A superficial Europeanisation of its migration policies, exemplified by the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, alongside Turkey's role as the largest host country to Syrian refugees following a rather non-European 'open door policy' introduced in 2011, illustrates the contradictions inherent in its governance approach (Aras & Mencütek, 2018; Genç, Heck & Hess, 2019; İçduygu & Aksel, 2012; İçduygu & Üstübcü, 2014; Karadağ, 2019; Tolay, 2016; Üstübcü, 2019).

This paper introduces a novel analytical framework to deepen our understanding of migration governance, using Turkey as a case study. It argues that existing frameworks, while valuable, too often privilege state-level analysis and fail to identify the specific actors, motivations, and power dynamics driving policy decisions. Sociology of Power, developed by Ferran Izquierdo Brichs (2008), offers a more comprehensive lens. It uncovers how elite actors use migration policy as a resource for the accumulation of power, often at the expense of migrants' rights and democratic governance. While this paper constitutes a preliminary research proposal, its findings point toward a research agenda that can inform the development of migration policies which safeguard migrants' lives, respect human rights and, uphold international laws.

Research Design and Methodology

Turkey was selected as the case study due to its dual role as both a transit and host country, providing a rich empirical basis for examining different types of migration governance. The timeframe - March 2000 to March 2024 - captures significant political developments: the rise of Erdoğan and the AKP, EU accession negotiations, the Syrian conflict, and the AKP's electoral decline in the March 2024 local elections (Adar, 2024). Turkey's increasing authoritarianism under Erdoğan also mirrors the global trend of neoliberal governance, making it a pertinent case for the application of Sociology of Power, which is grounded in a neoliberal perspective of International Relations (Boztaş, 2019; Hussein, 2022; Karadağ, 2019).

The research adopts a mixed-methods qualitative approach, drawing on secondary sources including academic literature, government reports, policy documents and media content, all analysed through content analysis. Primary data was collected via two semi-structured interviews conducted in Lancaster, England, in July 2024 - one with a Bangladeshi national who lived in Turkey between 2014 and 2017, and another with a Syrian humanitarian worker who fled to Turkey and worked in the NGO sector between 2013 and 2018. These interviews served to verify and complement secondary findings, with participants' identities anonymised.

Key limitations include the qualitative nature of the research (limiting generalisability), language barriers in both primary and secondary data collection, and the theoretical

challenge of applying a framework that assumes predictable, power-driven elite behaviour. Sociology of Power also requires an exhaustive identification of actors across multiple systemic levels - a task beyond the scope of this paper, which nonetheless aims to lay foundational groundwork.

Literature Review

Turkey as a Transit Country: Technocratic Institutionalisation

2001, also the year the AKP was formed, marked a turning point in Turkey's migration policy trajectory. Hopes of EU accession after the signing of the 2001 Accession Partnership Document "provided the impetus for legislative and institutional changes in the field of asylum and migration management" (Üstübcü, 2019, p. 6). The EU's desire to externalise migration management, combined with Turkey's own strategic engagement with the EU accession framework, positioned Ankara as the EU's de facto coastguard and fostered an increasingly technocratic approach to governance from the early 2000s. This process led to a wave of legislative and institutional change, including harsher penalties for trafficking in 2003, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013, and the creation of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) (Üstübcü, 2019, pp. 7-12). Despite these formal advances, the LFIP has significant shortcomings. Turkey maintains the 'geographical limitation' of the 1951 Geneva Convention, meaning non-European asylum seekers can only receive 'conditional refugee' status - a unique and precarious classification that hinders access to long-term protection or integration, and which the EU frequently urges to be abolished for accession (Aras & Mencütek, 2020, p. 81). The DGMM took over the UNHCR's registration responsibilities in 2018, becoming the sole official body for asylum management, a move justified on sovereignty grounds but whose capacity limitations have been widely questioned (Aras & Mencütek, 2020, p. 82; Öztürk, 2022, p. 269; Ulusoy, 2016). Dardağan (2013) further warns of the 'discretionary power of the administration' embedded in the LFIP, including expanded grounds for deportation and the risk of generalised exceptional procedures (p. 125).

The EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 deepened this technocratic and securitised approach. In exchange for €6 billion in aid and promises of renewed EU accession talks, Turkey agreed to the return of all new irregular migrants arriving on the Greek islands from its territory, the resettlement of one Syrian from Turkey to the EU for every Syrian returned from the Greek Islands, and the strengthening of border control measures (European Council, 2016). The construction of a 911 km wall along the Syrian border began in 2015, mirroring the EU's militarised enforcement via Frontex and Eurosur (Aras & Mencütek, 2018, p. 82; Bourbeau, 2011). These measures effectively discouraged irregular crossings but created humanitarian costs: new and more dangerous routes, deaths at borders, inhumane detention conditions, alongside reports of detention and deportation at the Turkey-Greece border and the denial of re-registration under Turkey's temporary protection regime for returning Syrians (Üstübcü, 2019, p. 12). The true impact of EU financial aid also remains uncertain due to a lack of planning, sustainability, and transparency (ECA, 2024).

The concept of 'migration diplomacy', proposed by İçduygu and Üstübcü (2014), captures how both Turkey and the EU instrumentalise migration as an indirect form of foreign policy

(p. 44). Kelly Greenhill's 'coercive engineered migration' (CEM) similarly identifies Turkey's strategic manipulation of migration flows to extract concessions – such as Erdoğan's threats to “open the gates” following the suspension of accession talks, and the temporary opening of the Turkish-Greek borders in 2020, which allowed – or in some cases forced – thousands of migrants to cross. This prompted an additional €500 million from the EU but caused violent conditions for migrants (Greenhill, 2016; Kaya, 2023). However, both frameworks treat the state as a unitary actor, overlooking internal power dynamics and humanitarian consequences.

Üstübici's analysis of the effects of EU externalised migration in Turkey also highlights its technocratic character, involving the “increasing activity of international organisations” and the “EU's conditionality, and financial and administrative support” (2019, pp. 7-14). Importantly, her analysis does not focus solely on state-level interactions but also considers domestic dynamics such as “civil society activism leading to critical reports on rights violations,” which pressured Turkish institutionalisation (Üstübici, 2019, p. 9). The mention of the 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent expansion of “the scope of deportations, facilitating the refoulement of people under international protection...” is also noteworthy, but it does not fully specify the actors involved or explain why such decisions were taken (Üstübici, 2019, p. 12).

Turkey as a Host Country: Evolving Policies and Regional Leadership

The Syrian Civil War from 2011 onwards prompted a strikingly different policy response: Erdoğan's ‘open door policy’, which ultimately made Turkey the world's largest refugee host, accommodating more than 2.7 million Syrians since 2011 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016a). Syrian nationals received Temporary Protection Status (TPS), granting access on paper to healthcare, education, and employment – though in practice, structural barriers and informal labour dependency were the norm. The temporary label itself created ‘constant legal and social insecurity’, preventing access to long-term residence permits or international protection (Genç et al., 2019, pp. 10-11).

Korkut's (2016) concept of ‘selective humanitarianism’ is successful in exposing the AKP's, discursively constructed response: framing Syrians as ‘Muslim guests’ requiring temporary protection, drawing on narratives of Ottoman moral responsibility and anti-Western superiority, boasting, for example, that “we have spent thus far more than four billion dollars, while Europe closed its doors on you [...]” (Korkut, 2016, pp. 2-7). This framing served political ends while leaving refugees in a structurally precarious position. Yet, Erdoğan's welcoming attitude was not reciprocated by his population, and anti-Syrian sentiment grew among the Turkish public, with violent incidents and racist social media campaigns (Ataç et al., 2017, p. 15). The border with Syria was officially closed in 2015 – a shift explained partly by Europeanisation dynamics and partly by domestic electoral pressures (Üstübici, 2019). Importantly, Korkut (2016) also appreciates the impact of the conflict between the AKP and the Kurds on migration governance (p. 14). The differential treatment of Syrian Kurds within Turkey further confirms the selective nature of the AKP's migration policies towards refugees. Yet this explanation does not fully address other relevant actors, such as NGOs,

nor the reasons why certain actors engage in this selective humanitarianism. Genç et al. (2019) similarly acknowledge the relevance of domestic tensions between the AKP and Kurdish forces of the PKK in shaping Syrian migration governance, noting that the failed peace negotiations and intensified conflict had repercussions for cross-border movements (p. 6). These analyses therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of migration governance by foregrounding the role of domestic power competition.

Natter's 'illiberal paradox' offers a further lens: autocratic regimes can adopt liberal immigration policies when it suits their economic or geopolitical interests (2018, p. 17). Turkey's open-door policy provided Erdoğan with cheap labour, soft power, and foreign aid – but this liberal approach was abandoned once its political utility declined.

Comprehensive Perspectives on Migration Governance

A neoliberal lens when analysing migration governance highlights the tendency to “court the top and fend off the bottom,” capturing Turkey's selective approach to migration policy through restrictions on low-skilled migrants and asylum seekers alongside more open policies for highly skilled migrants (Canterbury, 2010, p. 30; Joppke, 2021, p. 72). However, this perspective does not fully explain Turkey's initial 'open-door' policy for Syrians, which did not translate into formal labour integration and was perceived domestically as an economic strain (Korkut, 2016, p. 6). Canterbury's emphasis on 'cultural fear' can also be applied to Turkey, though here tensions are better understood through Kurdish-state relations rather than anti-Islam dynamics (2010, p. 37).

Simultaneously understanding the two types of migration discussed and their governance by the Turkish state requires a holistic view. Natter's 'three-level game' – balancing interests vis-à-vis origin countries, destination countries, and domestic constituencies (2018, p. 15) – captures Turkey's complex policy calculus, as does Özerim's (2018) analysis of the migration-foreign policy nexus. Natter is useful in showing how Turkey balances EU accession, relations with Syria, and domestic tensions, and Özerim highlights how migration policy is instrumentalised in foreign policy bargaining and domestic political timing (e.g., Merkel's 2015 visit). However, both frameworks underspecify internal state dynamics, particularly which actors drive decisions and why, and tend to privilege the state as a unitary actor. Özerim also leaves underexplored the role of NGOs and international organisations.

Overall, these approaches help reveal the instrumentalisation of migration policy but insufficiently unpack intrastate power dynamics, making it difficult to fully explain decision-making processes and accountability in Turkey's migration governance.

Sociology of Power as an Analytical Framework

Sociology of Power, developed by Ferran Izquierdo Brichs (2008), offers a framework for understanding social reality by uncovering power relations within a given system. Within any hierarchical system, a small number of powerful elites compete to maintain privileged positions by accumulating power through an array of resources – including the state, capital, ideology, coercion, and control of information (Brichs, 2008, pp. 19-20). Crucially, elites are

not abstract entities like 'the state', but specific individuals who control these bodies and use them as resources (Brichs, 2008, p. 85). Elites form 'circular relations' through which their power grows, typically to the detriment of the broader population and democratic quality (Brichs, 2008, p. 19).

The framework is also a critique of neoliberal hegemony: neoliberalism concentrates resources in the hands of elites through privatisation and deregulation, making it increasingly difficult for populations to reclaim democratic agency, exacerbating inequalities and pushing society further from democracy (Brichs, 2008, p. 13; 2017, p. 82). Applied to Turkey, Brichs and Fernandez (2008) have previously shown how the AKP outmanoeuvred the military elite by adopting a conservative, EU-aligned identity and using constitutional, judicial, and economic reforms to suppress competitors (pp. 110-129). Connell (2014) describes the AKP as 'one of the most successful neoliberal parties in the world', combining 'neoliberalism and moderate Islamism' whilst delivering little redistribution (p. 133). Hussein (2022) further documents how AKP governance deploys disciplinary statecraft and coercive state apparatuses to marginalise democratic opposition (p. 13) - dynamics that align precisely with Brichs's framework.

Sociology of Power Applied to Turkey's Migration Governance

Consolidation of AKP Power through EU Relations

When the AKP took power in 2002 amid economic crisis and a fragmented political landscape - with inflation rates up to 70% - its main competitor was the military (Commission of European Communities, 2002, p. 52). EU accession offered a strategic solution: it was supported by over 60% of the Turkish population between 2000 and 2006, providing the AKP with electoral legitimacy (Yilmaz, 2011); it required institutionalisation that the AKP could capture and use as a resource; and it offered access to broader alliances and capital flows within the neoliberal EU system. Sociology of Power thus reframes EU accession not as a democratic aspiration, but as a mechanism for the accumulation of power. This perspective is crucial for understanding how migration governance is embedded within broader strategies of elite power accumulation.

The institutionalisation required for accession illustrates Brichs's insight that «elites adopt norms or create institutions which become new resources for their accumulation of power,» looking beyond state-level interactions to specific actors and their motivations (2017, p. 106). Migration management institutions - the DGMM and AFAD - were placed under the auspices of the Prime Minister's office and Ministry of Interior respectively, ensuring that AKP elites controlled both the use and production of coercion (Korkut, 2016, pp. 2, 9). This shift displaced the military from its prior role, consolidating political elites as the dominant actors in migration management, and illustrates Brichs's distinction: normally political elites use coercion, while the military produces it; the AKP's institutionalisation allowed them to become both users and producers (Brichs, 2017, p. 148). Legal reforms to the presidential electoral rules in 2014 and the 2017 Constitutional Referendum further highlight the progressive consolidation of Erdoğan's control (Apaydın & Müftüler-Baç, 2022, p. 222).

The deterioration of Turkish democracy discussed further below resulted in a standstill of EU-Turkey negotiations, further strained by Erdoğan's visa-free travel policies with countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Russia, driven by ambitions of regional leadership and economic gain (Kaya, 2020, p. 25). Yet Turkey's geographical proximity to the Greek islands allowed Erdoğan to leverage migration as a bargaining tool, preventing a complete estrangement from the EU and maintaining capital flow from elite alliances in the European Commission and Member States. Migration across the Aegean Sea was allowed to surge, with 22,636 crossings from Turkey to Greece recorded between April and September 2016 (Amnesty International, 2017, as cited in Karadağ, 2019, p. 11). Erdoğan thus instrumentalised migration management to bolster his legitimacy and power, capitalising on EU perceptions of irregular migration as a threat. Soykan (2021) further clarifies that the AKP has deliberately embraced its role as a coastguard to the EU for "foreign and domestic policy benefits and the camouflage of committed and still ongoing human rights violations" (p. 23). Preoccupied with curbing 'illegal migration', the EU largely ignored Turkey's deterioration of democracy and Erdoğan's authoritarianism remained unchallenged.

Karadağ's interviews with Coast Guard workers further illustrate how resources are captured by primary elites within circular relations: as one worker noted, «nothing actually changed after the deal with respect to [our] capacity and equipment» (Interviews 14 and 15 August 2016 as cited in Karadağ, 2019, p. 10). Karadağ also highlights that these shortages are unevenly distributed within the Coast Guard itself, reflecting "hierarchical positions and competitive social relations" (2019, p.10), where elite heads of team benefit disproportionately compared to lower-level personnel. Given that the Coast Guard is a branch of the Armed Forces, this unequal distribution also reflects broader AKP-military power tensions over control of coercive institutions. Overall, primary elites within each circular relation prioritise their own accumulation of power at the expense of improving migration management.

The AKP and International Organisations

International organisations such as the UNHCR and IOM were structurally constrained by the framework constructed by AKP elites. Turkey joined the IOM in 2004, but international organisations must operate within the parameters of the LFIP and TPS - frameworks that fall short of international law. The IOM was thus compelled to serve state interests 'pragmatically', significantly complicating efforts to provide adequate healthcare, protection and social support to refugees (Timur et al., 2023, pp. 23-30).

The UNHCR's role was further diminished by Turkey's geographical limitation and effectively curtailed in 2018 when responsibility for asylum registration was transferred entirely to the DGMM (UNHCR, 2018). This consolidation of control serves the primary elites by minimising external oversight. Interview data also revealed that a Canadian resettlement programme commissioned by the IOM - which selectively targeted high-skilled Syrians - was eventually blocked by Turkish authorities once they recognised they were losing economically productive migrants (Personal Communication 2, 17th July 2024). As Brichs reminds us, one must examine 'whether institutions, as well as policies, serve the welfare of the population or the interests of the elite' (2017, p. 60). This mirrors Joppke's (2021) analysis of 'court[ing] the top, fend[ing] off the bottom' (p. 72) - and

illustrates the instrumentalisation of migrants as economic assets rather than rights-bearing individuals.

The Strategically Liberal Response to the Syrian War

Erdoğan's 'open door policy' for Syrians in 2011 was not humanitarian in origin but strategic. The AKP leveraged Islamic ideology and a discourse of moral solidarity to justify hosting Syrians, cultivating an image of Turkey as a 'global humanitarian leader' – a form of soft power accumulation (Korkut, 2016, p. 12). Control over information was central to this: through censorship and self-censorship, the government created what Foucault (1976) would call a 'regime of truth', portraying migration as a controlled and virtuous process (Brichs, 2017, p. 206; Sert & Danış, 2021, p. 208). Journalists were reportedly barred from reporting news that might increase anti-migrant sentiment (Sert & Danış, 2021, p. 208), and government elites used coercion and repression to promote anti-Western ideologies and garner domestic support.

In material terms, Syrian refugees provided economic benefits: cheap informal labour, entrepreneurial contributions to GDP – estimated at 1.96% growth, with projections of up to 4.05% by 2028 (Istanbul Chamber of Commerce as cited in Salim, 2024; ORSAM, 2017, p. 34) – and diplomatic leverage over the EU. Interview evidence reveals a gap between the open-door narrative and reality: stability and legal recognition were functionally available only to Syrians with passports – a costly and rare document – while others lived under the precarious TPS, often working informally (Personal Communication 2, 17th July 2024). By March 2018, only 20,000 work permits had been issued to Syrians under TPS in Turkey (Üstübcü, 2019, p. 13). Sociology of Power exposes what other frameworks partially miss: Syrian refugees were not simply recipients of policy, but resources in the AKP's broader competition for power, aligning with the 'illiberal paradox' and Political Economy approaches (Natter, 2018; Canterbury, 2010). It also accounts for the influence of other actors, such as institutions, while identifying the political and economic elites involved in these competing dynamics. Further research should therefore focus on specifying these actors and analysing their power relations.

Authoritarian Clampdown: Reversal and Securitisation

From 2015, the political context shifted decisively. The AKP's first loss of its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 elections – particularly due to the pro-Kurdish HDP historically surpassing the electoral threshold –, combined with Kurdish empowerment resulting from the Syrian conflict, threatened AKP dominance and led to a breakdown of the PKK ceasefire (Kaya & Whiting, 2019, p. 8; Savran, 2020, p. 784). Erdoğan responded by closing the Syrian border, securitising migration, and calling snap elections for November 2015. The border closure served multiple functions: mitigating the Kurdish threat, aligning with EU concerns ahead of critical negotiations, and recalibrating domestic electoral politics. Angela Merkel's visit to Turkey in 2015 – on the eve of Turkish elections – is emblematic of this nexus, representing a revitalisation of EU-Turkey relations timed to benefit the AKP's reconsolidation of power (Özerim, 2018, p. 173).

The CHP centred its election manifesto around Syrian refugees, with over 40 detailed clauses, attracting neonationalist voters and pressuring the AKP to adopt a more restrictive discourse (Atlas, 2019). As Brichs notes, threats are constructed at the service of some

elites: Syrian refugees were progressively redefined from 'guests' to burdens or 'illegal migrants' as their political utility changed (2017, pp. 120-121). Former Foreign Minister Davutoğlu – arguably the main proponent of the open-door policy – even began using the term 'illegal migrant', a first among party leaders, while Prime Minister Yıldırım publicly warned that «any Syrians stepping out of line would be deported» (Aydemir, 2022, p. 670; NTV 2017 as cited in Ataç et al., 2017, p. 15).

The 2016 coup attempt in response to increasing authoritarianism under Erdoğan's rule marked a further inflection point. Erdoğan declared a State of Emergency – extended multiple times until 2018 – dramatically expanding his powers and those of allied elites (HRA, 2022). The consequences for migration governance were severe: thousands of illegal pushbacks and detentions, expanded deportation grounds, and arbitrary changes to the LFIP facilitating the removal of humanitarian workers and refugees (Boztaş, 2019, pp. 158-9; Üstübici, 2019). Over 125,000 civil servants were dismissed, 140 media outlets shut down, and 148 journalists detained (Gumrukcu & Tattersall, 2016, as cited in Karadağ, 2019, p. 11). The UNHCR's effective suspension in Turkey by 2018 was a direct consequence of this environment.

The treatment of NGOs further illustrates the AKP's strategic deployment of coercion. Organisations aligned with the AKP, such as IHH, were instrumentalised to reinforce the government's humanitarian discourse, while others were repressed, defunded, or coerced into adopting state-sanctioned narratives (Ataç et al., 2017, p. 15; Boztaş, 2019). Interviewee 2 witnessed first-hand “all sorts of corruption” in the NGO sector, with “huge amounts of money stolen, laundered” (Personal Communication 2, 17th July 2024). As Özçetin finds, «the NGOs closeness to the state is the main factor determining its influence and flexibility,» and structural limitations imposed by government elites push NGOs toward state-approved, needs-based rather than rights-based advocacy (2024 pp. 276-280). The differential treatment of municipalities – with AKP-aligned ones receiving far greater collaboration and resources – similarly demonstrates how primary elites ensure that competing actors remain subordinate, with direct consequences for migrants: «municipal authorities do very little to challenge national immigration regimes that are increasingly marginalising Syrians and irregular migrants» (Boztaş, 2019, p. 159; Kaya, 2023).

The case of Syrian Kurds demonstrates the intersection of ethnic politics and migration governance most starkly. Excluded from the open-door policy during the 2014 Kobane crisis, Syrian Kurds were denied the TPS afforded to other Syrians when borders were eventually opened (Korkut, 2016, p. 15). Davutoğlu publicly claimed Turkey was hosting 200,000 Kobane refugees when the actual figure was approximately 6,000, a fabrication designed to generate soft power (BGST, 2015 in Korkut, 2016, p. 17). As Brichs states, “the definition of friend or enemy is linked to the interests of the elites”: migrants are classified as 'guests' or 'illegal immigrants' depending entirely on their utility to AKP power accumulation (2017, p. 210). In 2019, amid economic crisis and the loss of 11 mayoral seats, Erdoğan announced plans for a 'safe zone' 30 km into Syria to resettle 2 million refugees – a policy driven by the

need to appease both the electorate and his Kurdish rivals, but resulting in unlawful, coerced returns to inhumane conditions (Morgül, 2023, p. 44-46; Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Sociology of Power provides a valuable and underutilised analytical framework for understanding migration governance. By examining Turkey's migration policies through this lens, the paper has revealed that the AKP's shifting approaches – from technocratic institutionalisation, to liberal open-door, to securitised repatriation – are best understood not as responses to migration pressures per se, but as strategies in an ongoing competition for the accumulation of power by elite actors.

Compared to existing frameworks, Sociology of Power offers several advantages. Concepts such as 'migration diplomacy', 'coercive engineered migration', and 'selective humanitarianism' illuminate the instrumentalisation of migration but retain a largely state-centric perspective. Natter's three-level game and Özerim's foreign policy nexus incorporate international factors but fail to specify the actors involved or their motivations. Sociology of Power addresses these gaps by identifying who the relevant elites are, what resources they deploy, and how their circular relations produce policy outcomes – often to the detriment of migrants and democratic governance.

The framework is not without limitations. It assumes predictable, power-driven behaviour by elite actors, which may not always hold. It also requires an exhaustive analysis of actors across multiple systemic levels – including the EU, international organisations, and global financial institutions – which exceeds the scope of this paper. Future research should build on this foundation through in-depth fieldwork, additional interviews with insider perspectives, and expanded analysis of the individual actors and power dynamics within Turkey's political institutions and civil society.

The March 2024 local elections – in which the opposition CHP secured a decisive victory – signal a potential reshuffling of Turkey's primary elites. Given the CHP's stated positions on migration governance, including calls for greater diplomatic engagement with the Al Assad regime and a more Europeanised approach, tracking how new actors reshape migration policy through the Sociology of Power lens will be a valuable avenue for future research.

Ultimately, this paper argues that understanding migration governance requires going beyond the state as a unitary actor and attending to the specific individuals, resources, and power competitions that shape policy. Sociology of Power offers a rigorous framework to do so – one that can inform the development of migration policies that genuinely prioritize migrant rights, uphold international law, and resist instrumentalisation for elite gain.

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