

SWP Research Paper

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*Sinem Adar*

# Rethinking Political Attitudes of Migrants from Turkey and Their Germany-Born Children

Beyond Loyalty and Democratic Culture



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for  
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 7  
June 2019, Berlin

Since the presidential elections in 2014, Turkish voters abroad have cast their votes in three parliamentary elections, one presidential election, and one referendum. The relatively higher vote share that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan garnered in Germany and other European states with large Turkish immigration levels, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria, has remained a cause for concern to politicians and the public in these countries. Especially in Germany, the dominant premise in the public debate has been that voting in favor of the AKP and Erdoğan is a sign of “loyalty to Turkey” and an absence of a commitment to democratic values and norms.

The broad appeal that the AKP and Erdoğan have among migrants from Turkey and their children has both a material and an emotional basis. Socio-economic changes and perceived improvements in the quality of state institutions, both within Turkey and Germany, seem to have created a positive image of the party. In addition, a strong sense of pride arising out of the perception of a “strong Turkey” under the leadership of President Erdoğan seems to drive electoral support. Finally, a fear of losing social and political gains also facilitates electoral support for the AKP.

Given that the interest of the Turkish government in the migrant population is driven by its foreign- and domestic-policy ambitions, it is likely to continue in the future with a strong identitarian focus. Moreover, Turkey’s deepening economic crisis is also likely to accentuate the need for economic remittances. It is vitally important to differentiate between the Turkish government’s systematic efforts to instrumentalize migrants and their foreign-born children toward its domestic- and foreign-policy ends and the demands of migrants for political representation and equal recognition.

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ISSN 1863-1053  
doi: 10.18449/2019RP07

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*Dr Sinem Adar was the 2018 IPC-Stiftung Mercator Fellow at SWP. The Mercator IPC Fellowship Program at SWP is funded by Stiftung Mercator.*

## **Rethinking Political Attitudes of Migrants from Turkey and Their Germany-Born Children: Beyond Loyalty and Democratic Culture**

As a result of the changes introduced into existing election law in 2008 and the subsequent measures taken in 2012, all Turkish citizens over the age of 18 gained the right to vote at the ballot boxes stationed in their countries of residence. Even though Turkish citizens have been able to vote in Turkish elections since 1987, this was only possible at the ballot stations installed at Turkish airports and border controls. New changes introduced into the election law thus significantly eased the financial and logistical burdens of voting. Since the presidential elections in 2014, when the electorate for the first time cast their votes in their countries of residence, voting has become a frequent practice, as Turkey has had three parliamentary elections, one presidential election, and one referendum.

During the period between 2014 and 2018, the number of registered voters abroad increased from about 2.8 to 3 million. Around half of the registered voters outside of Turkey reside in Germany, where the turnout rate increased during the same period, from 18.93 percent to 45.7 percent. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, garnered the majority of the votes, scoring even higher percentages than in Turkey. Similarly, the YES vote in Turkey's controversial constitutional referendum in 2017 gained a higher share in Germany compared to its share in Turkey. The level of mass support given to the AKP and President Erdoğan had a considerable effect on the election outcomes. External votes constituted around 19 percent of the total difference between the YES and the NO votes in the 2017 referendum. Similarly, President Erdoğan's vote share in the 2018 presidential elections amounted to 50.8 percent of the total number of eligible votes, barely giving him a win in the first round. Combined with the 894,585 votes cast for him abroad, he won 52.59 percent of the eligible votes.

The relatively higher vote share that the AKP and President Erdoğan garnered in Germany and other European states with large Turkish immigration levels, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria,

has remained a cause for concern to politicians and the public in these countries. Especially in Germany, the dominant premise in the public debate has been that voting in favor of the AKP and Erdoğan is a sign of “loyalty to Turkey” — and thus, of failed integration — and an absence of a commitment to democratic values and norms.

The new regulations in the election law that allowed citizens abroad to vote in their countries of residence came in the context of Turkey’s changing approach since 2010 to migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children. In the last decade, concurrent with a global increase in diaspora policies, the AKP government has systematically designed and implemented policies targeting migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children. This new phase has seen the creation of new state agencies; an open interest in youth mobilization; a transnational penetration by various state and civil society actors into educational, cultural, and, religious arenas; and, last but not least, a broader understanding of the diaspora defined by religious unity. For the first time in the history of modern Turkey, a separate government institution — called the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) — was founded in 2010 under the aegis of the office of the prime minister to, as stated in its mission statement, foster Turkish migrants’ participation in the societies they live in without losing their cultural heritage. Improving Turkish language skills and acquiring a good grasp of Sunni Muslim teachings and practices are seen as essential. A broader approach to welfare provision, notably as regards family and education, distinguishes the current policies.

In fact, outside of Turkey, the AKP’s competitive advantage over opposition parties has been derived to a significant extent from its claimed ownership over the policies targeting migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children. Such a claim owes its power to the increasingly blurred boundaries between the political party and the state institutions.

Increasingly close contact between the party, state institutions, and civil society actors has created a patronage network that includes old and new associations with close ties to the AKP government, such as the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB) and the Union of European Turkish Democrats (renamed in 2018 as the Union of International Democrats, UID), respectively.

Concerted policies targeting the everyday needs of migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children

— together with the discourse of a strong state adopted by, and represented in, the persona of a charismatic leader such as Erdoğan — resonate well with the already existing demands of migrants. Since the 1990s, Turkish migrants have voiced two main concerns in meetings with Turkish politicians: better and more representation within Turkey; and a better organized associational realm in Germany that would address and cater to the social, cultural, and political needs of migrants, and thus, contribute to their social standing within Germany. Against this background, the strong and broad appeal that the AKP and Erdoğan garner among migrants and their Germany-born children has both a material and an emotional basis. Socio-economic changes and perceived improvements in the quality of state institutions, both within Turkey and Germany, seem to have created a positive image of the party. In addition, a strong sense of pride arising out of the perception of a “strong Turkey” under the leadership of President Erdoğan seems to drive electoral support. Finally, a fear of losing social and political gains also facilitates electoral support to the AKP.

Given that the interest of the Turkish government in the migrant population is driven by its foreign- and domestic-policy ambitions, it is likely to continue in the future with a strong identitarian focus. Moreover, Turkey’s deepening economic crisis is also likely to accentuate the need for economic remittances. For policy-makers and politicians, the most essential starting point should be to differentiate between the Turkish government’s systematic efforts to instrumentalize migrants and their foreign-born children toward its domestic- and foreign-policy ends and the demands of migrants. Addressing these demands, which are mainly centered around claims for political representation and equal recognition, is not easy at a time when populist claims and anti-immigrant sentiments in Germany and elsewhere in Europe are on the rise. However, the challenge should not stop policy-makers from developing policies that address these concerns. Granting migrants from Turkey and their Germany-born children the right to vote in local elections is vital. Furthermore, the question of political representation should not be confined solely to voting rights. Migrant associations are influential actors in making claims on behalf of migrants. Given the increasing influence of the Turkish state in the associational landscape, institutional autonomy should be highly encouraged. Last, but not least, political actors should also be wary of exclusionary discourses against Islam and against practicing Muslims.



# From Leaving Turkey to Settling in Germany

Migration from Turkey to Germany has a long history, going back to the arrival of the “guest workers” in the early 1960s. Even though economic motivation was the primary driver behind this first phase of migration, catalysts have diversified over the decades in parallel to political and socio-economic developments in Turkey. Especially around the 1980 coup d'état and throughout the 1990s, accelerating political suppression, particularly against leftist and Kurdish dissent, led to an increase in the number of asylum seekers and political exiles from Turkey. Around the same time, there was a broad pattern of “sporadic migration” of highly skilled laborers and students, which continued in the decades to come.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, the unprecedented purge in the aftermath of the July 15 putsch in 2016 opened a new chapter in the history of both political and economic migration from Turkey to Germany.

Almost half a century later following the arrival of “guest workers” in Germany, migrants from Turkey and their children make up the country's largest migrant population today,<sup>2</sup> amounting to approximately 2.9 million.<sup>3</sup> Of this total, 52.2 percent have been born in Germany. The population is relatively young, with those between the ages 20 and 40 constituting 48 percent of the total. The male to female ratio is close to 1:1, with males constituting 51.5 percent of the total population. With regard to legal

status, approximately half of the population has only Turkish citizenship, whereby those with only German citizenship amount to around 800,000 and those with dual citizenship are estimated to be around 530,000.<sup>4</sup>

## Diversification of Migration Patterns

Workers from Turkey started arriving in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in the 1960s in the context of the Labor Recruitment Agreements. Labor agreements were signed with Germany in 1961; Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands in 1964; France in 1965; and Sweden in 1967.<sup>5</sup> The global oil crisis in 1973 led to a decrease in the demand for foreign workers, halting the labor agreement with Germany. Nevertheless, Turkish migrants continued to arrive (although in considerably smaller numbers) until the 1980s, mostly in the context of family unification. During this time, a total of 790,289 migrants arrived in various European countries.<sup>6</sup> Of these, 648,029 came to Germany.<sup>7</sup>

Guest workers from Turkey consisted of ethnic Turks and Kurds who were mostly coming from rural

<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Krumm, *Germany's Turkish Voters – What Do We Know?* (Istanbul: Turkish-German University, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Of the more than six million Turkish citizens living outside of Turkey, around 5.5 million reside in Western Europe. See the website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-expatriate-turkish-citizens.en.mfa> (accessed 1 December 2018).

<sup>3</sup> See *Migration Report 2015* (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) (in German), [https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2015.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2015.pdf?__blob=publicationFile) (accessed 1 December 2018).

<sup>4</sup> See Christoph Sydow, “German-Turkish: Debates on the Dual Citizenship – These Are the Facts” (in German), *Der Spiegel*, 5 August 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/deuschtuerken-doppelte-staatsbuergerschaft-das-sind-die-fakten-a-1106363.html> (accessed 5 December 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Yurdakul notes that there was already a small amount of Turkish workers in Germany working in the shipment industry before the labor agreements. See Gökçe Yurdakul, *From Guest Workers into Muslims: The Transformation of Turkish Immigrant Associations in Germany* (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 24.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://media.iskur.gov.tr/21271/dundenbugunei.skur.pdf> (retrieved from the Turkish Employment Agency [İŞKUR], accessed 1 December 2018).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

areas in Turkey. Families started arriving in the 1970s following the new provisions introduced in 1969 about family unifications into the Law on European Economic Community Residence. The voluntary return programs implemented by the Helmut Kohl government in 1983–1984 resulted in the return of some economic migrants, but the numbers at the time remained negligible.<sup>8</sup> Over time, around half of the population who came to Germany between 1961 and the 1990s returned to Turkey.<sup>9</sup> By the late 1980s, it became clear both to German and Turkish authorities that a considerable percentage of the economic migrants who initially came on a temporary basis would stay and not go back to Turkey.

In the case of asylum-seekers, the very question of staying was undoubtedly less ambiguous. Asylum-seekers started arriving in Germany as early as the 1970s, at a time of intense political turmoil in Turkey marked by severe ideological clashes. Numerous leftist activists went into exile in Germany during this time. Yet, a mass arrival of asylum-seekers did not take place until the takeover by the military in 1980. Political migration from Turkey continued during the 1990s; yet, this time it was mostly Kurdish citizens who were displaced during the armed conflict between the Turkish army and members of the Kurdish militia, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), seeking refuge in Germany.

Even though Turkish politics entered into a relatively quiet and seemingly stable phase with the rise of the AKP to power as a single-party government in 2002, socio-political conflicts started to resurface in the late 2000s, culminating in what would turn out to be the most suppressive governance in the history of contemporary Turkey. The July 15 putsch in 2016 – and the subsequent purge that was even more expansive and extensive than its predecessor following the 1980 coup – has led to yet another phase of political migration.<sup>10</sup> Besides asylum-seekers, numerous academics, artists, and journalists are currently in Germany, mostly on temporary residence permits. Moreover, in line with the current brain drain from

Turkey and the rapidly deepening economic crisis,<sup>11</sup> many highly skilled workers have also arrived in the last few years. The future predicament of these newcomers – whether they will remain in Germany or not – for the moment remains ambiguous, as does the future of Turkey.

## Changes in associational engagements

Along with the diversification of migration patterns and, as a result, an increasingly diverse population, migrants' associational engagements have also varied and changed. Over the decades, the associational landscape has witnessed the emergence of myriad organizations with different political orientations and motivations. Moreover, migrants themselves have become more organized around issues that concern their lives in Germany. Most recently, in the last decade, the associational landscape has taken on a noticeably new character with the penetration of various pro-AKP organizations.

Historically, numerous spaces have been active in the socialization of migrants and their children. Among these are coffee shops, mosques, and various forms of organizations including neighborhood, hometown, and migrant associations. Since the 1960s, Turkish politics has been a topic of interest for many, regardless of their political orientations. Events on Turkish politics, such as public talks, lectures, memorial events, and demonstrations, are not uncommon. Given the ethnically, religiously, and ideologically diverse nature of the population, these events span a wide range of areas and topics: from the celebration of national holidays to genocide commemoration.

Notwithstanding the general interest in Turkish politics, it is difficult to infer a direct relation to collective mobilization on the basis of such a tendency. In other words, an interest in Turkish politics does not necessarily translate into a willingness and ability to organize and mobilize crowds around causes related to Turkish politics. The latter most often goes hand in hand with the degree and form of associational engagement. According to the activity report in 2007–2008 of the Turkish Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Commission around twenty percent of

<sup>8</sup> Yurdakul, *From Guestworkers into Muslims* (see note 5), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Yaşar Aydın, *The New Turkish Diaspora Policy: Its Aims, Their Limits and the Challenges for Associations of People of Turkish Origin and Decision-makers in Germany*, SWP Research Paper 10 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, October 2014).

<sup>10</sup> For the updated post-coup purge figures, see [https://turkeypurge.com/?fbclid=IwAR1tBi\\_JQ87xWbec1GqHQSr9BT4V1fjCMMdH8FnLHylJupkbr28Qkdr4uSg](https://turkeypurge.com/?fbclid=IwAR1tBi_JQ87xWbec1GqHQSr9BT4V1fjCMMdH8FnLHylJupkbr28Qkdr4uSg) (accessed 10 December 2018).

<sup>11</sup> “Spurning Erdoğan’s Vision, Turks Leave in Drove, Draining Money and Talent”, *New York Times*, 2 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/02/world/europe/turkey-emigration-Erdogan.html> (accessed 13 February 2019).

Turkish migrants in Germany were estimated to be organized.<sup>12</sup>

**Over the last five to six decades,  
the civic capacity of migrants from  
Turkey and their children has  
developed considerably.**

Over the last five to six decades, the civic capacity of migrants from Turkey and their children has developed considerably. Throughout the 1970s, labor unions and *landsmannschaftliche* organizations overwhelmed the associational realm.<sup>13</sup> This situation started to change in the late 1970s with the founding of new organizations and the diversification of political orientations.<sup>14</sup> Noteworthy is that this was also when the Turkish state stepped into the associational realm. Some of the new associations established, such as the *Föderation der Türkisch-Demokratischen Idealistenvereine in Deutschland e.V.* (ATF) and DITIB, were closely tied to the Turkish state. The ATF was founded in 1978 to counter the activities of Kurdish associations and the PKK.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, DITIB was founded in 1984 to counter the powerful position in Germany of Islamist groups such as the Islamic Community *Milli Görüş* (IGMG, *Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş*) and the Federation of Islamic Cultural Centers (VIKZ, *Verband Islamischer Kulturzentren* of the religious order called *Süleymanlılar*), which, at the time, were both considered by Turkey as radical groups.<sup>16</sup>

12 See the Human Rights Sub-Commission of the Turkish Parliament (in Turkish): [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/belge/Komisyon\\_Faaliyet\\_Raporu.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/belge/Komisyon_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2018).

13 These organizations are mostly coffeehouses registered as e.V. (*eingetragener Vereine* – registered organizations). Mostly male spaces, *landsmannschaftliche* organizations, continue to play an important role in the socialization of Turkish migrants. See Yurdakul, *From Guestworkers into Muslims* (see note 5), 34.

14 Yurdakul, *From Guestworkers into Muslims* (see note 5), 34. Here, I only focus on associations with ties to the Turkish state. One should bear in mind that the associational landscape is much more diverse.

15 Alynna J. Lyon and Emek M. Uçarer, “Mobilizing Ethnic Conflict: Kurdish Separatism in Germany and the PKK”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 6 (2001): 925–48.

16 Günter Seufert, “Die ‘Türkisch-Islamische Union’ (DITB) der türkischen Religionsbehörde”, in *Turkish Islam and Europe*, ed. Günter Seufert and Jacques Waardenburg (Istanbul and Stuttgart, 1999), 261–93. On German–Turkey cooperation

Changes in the associational realm were, however, not limited to the expansion and diversification of organizations. They also involved a shift in claims-making practices. Even though, at the beginning, concerns related to Turkey overwhelmed associational practices, this started to change in the late 1980s/early 1990s as concerns around living in Germany gained prominence.<sup>17</sup> Influential in this shift were two factors: the growing understanding among migrants themselves that their stay would be permanent, and the changing socio-economic and socio-political conditions in Germany, especially following unification.<sup>18</sup> Migrant associations have – regardless of their political orientation and their degree of closeness to the Turkish state – increasingly focused on issues that concern migrants in Germany. For instance, DITIB and the IGMG swiftly developed a thematic focus on discrimination, mostly understood and expressed in relation to religion and religious differences.

In addition to the expansion and diversification of the associational realm since the late 1970s – not only in terms of the type of organizations but also with regard to the type of claims made – the associational landscape gained a new dimension in the early 2000s with the founding of pro-AKP organizations such as the UID; the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA); and the Yunus Emre Foundation and Yunus Emre cultural centers. These organizations have been effective in mobilizing migrants in favor of the AKP and President Erdoğan. Moreover, they also actively work toward forming and influencing public opinion abroad about the AKP.

For instance, the UID was founded in 2004 in Cologne as a lobby organization for the AKP with the support of the then – Prime Minister Erdoğan.<sup>19</sup> It has offices all over Europe, 15 of which are based in Germany. As stated on its website, the UID aims to promote the preservation of cultural and linguistic

curtailing political Islam, also see Behlül Özkan, “Cold-war Era Relations between West Germany and Turkish Political Islam: From an Anti-communist Alliance to a Domestic Security Issue”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 31–54.

17 Demir Küçükaydın, *In the Memory of Those Who Left* (in Turkish) (Istanbul, 2013).

18 Yurdakul, *From Guestworkers into Muslims* (see note 5), 38.

19 “The Lobby behind Turkey’s Prime Minister”, *Deutsche Welle*, 21 May 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-lobby-behind-turkeys-prime-minister/a-17652516> (accessed 10 December 2018).

heritage. At the same, it is also tasked with encouraging the active participation of migrants from Turkey and their children in the societies where they now live. These two objectives echo the general position advocated by Erdoğan and AKP officials to promote “integration but not assimilation.”<sup>20</sup> The board members of the UID often appear in discussions aired on Turkish TV channels broadcasting abroad, such as TRT Avrupa and Kanal Avrupa. The UID also plays an active role in the organization of the rallies and speeches of Turkish political actors in Europe as well as in the mobilization of the constituents during elections.

Currently presided over by Erdoğan’s extended family members,<sup>21</sup> SETA, on the other hand, was conceived by former president Abdullah Gül and initiated in 2005 by the ousted prime minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, as a prestigious partisan think tank.<sup>22</sup> The current spokesperson to President Erdoğan, Ibrahim Kalın, served as its founding director while still holding close ties to Davutoğlu. SETA has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington DC, Cairo, and Berlin and regularly publishes pro-AKP opinion pieces and reports about Turkey’s domestic and foreign policies. As such, the think tank actively aims at exerting an influence on public opinion and political debates.

**20** “Assimilation Is a Crime against Humanity” (in German), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 May 2010, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/erdogan-rede-in-koeln-im-wortlaut-assimilation-ist-ein-verbrechen-gegen-die-menschlichkeit-1.293718> (accessed 23 April 2019).

**21** “President Erdoğan Was Gifted with a Kriter Painting” (in Turkish), *Kriter*, February 2017, <https://kriterdergi.com/siyaset/cumhurbaskani-erdogana-kriter-kapakli-tablo-hediye-edildi> (accessed 23 April 2019).

**22** “Erdoğan’s Defence against Liberal Muslims in Berlin” (in German), *Tagesspiegel*, 4 April 2019, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/tuerkisches-institut-Erdogans-abwehreinheit-gegen-liberale-muslime-in-berlin/24184860.html> (accessed 23 April 2019).

# Turkey's Policies toward Migrants from Turkey and Their Foreign-Born Children

Along with the changes in the associational realm, Turkey's relationship with migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children has also altered since the 1960s. Numerous factors – such as perceptions about the temporal nature of migration from Turkey, changing security and foreign policy concerns of the Turkish state, and last, but not least, the demands of the migrants themselves – have influenced Turkish policy-making toward migrants from Turkey and their children. Three distinct phases mark the policy changes and developments.

## Temporary Stay: Economic and Social Remittances

Economic migration from Turkey to Germany was initially based on the rotation principle. Workers were expected to return to Turkey at the end of their first year in Germany. Even though the principle failed to work in practice, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the perception that it generated about the temporal character of economic migration significantly shaped the nature of relations between Turkish authorities and the migrant population. During the 1960s and 1970s, the main driving force was economic and social remittances.<sup>23</sup> Until 1971, the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) and the consulates acted as the primary government institutions coordinating relations with the migrant population. In 1971, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) became another actor, mainly responsible

<sup>23</sup> Damla Aksel, "Turkey's Migrants and the Change in Policies" (in Turkish), *İç Politika*, 3 November 2016.

for the provision of imams and other religious representatives.<sup>24</sup>

## Toward Permanent Stay and Turkey's Increasing Security Concerns

The changing nature of migration from Turkey around the 1980 coup d'état and the realization that guest workers might indeed not return to Turkey caused a shift in government policies. "Citizens living abroad" became a popular term during this time, used to refer to migrants from Turkey and their children.<sup>25</sup> In this second phase of policy-making, unlike the preceding period, the Turkish state became more involved in the lives of migrants. This shift in the policy outlook was expressed in Article 62 of the 1982 Constitution, drafted under the auspices of the military. Accordingly, the "state could [can] take necessary steps to ensure family unity, the education of children, the cultural needs and the social security of Turkish nationals working abroad, and could [can] also take the necessary measures to reinforce their ties with the home country, in addition to assisting them on their return to home."<sup>26</sup>

Issues such as dual citizenship, welfare provisions for the migrant population, the right to vote, as well

<sup>24</sup> Kerem Öktem, *Turkey's New Diaspora Policy: The Challenge, Inclusivity, Outreach and Capacity* (Istanbul Policy Center, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Aksel, "Turkey's Migrants and the Change in Policies" (see note 23). The term "Euro-Turks" also became popular in the 1990s. Also see Aydın, *The New Turkish Diaspora Policy* (see note 9), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Zeynep Sahin Mencütek and Bahar Baser, "Mobilizing Diasporas: Insights from Turkey's Attempts to Reach Turkish Citizens Abroad", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (2018): 86–105.

as the provision of language and religion classes in the countries of residence became central to the communication exchange between Turkish political actors and migrants, especially throughout the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> During this time, the Ministry of Education emerged as a new actor partaking in the coordination of policies, especially in the realms of language and religious education.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, with the introduction of the “Pink Card” in 1995, Turkish citizens who had to renounce their citizenship to obtain German citizenship gained the same residence, travel, and work rights that were granted to Turkish citizens. However, Pink Cards did not extend the right of political representation or public employment.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the changing perception about the temporality of the migrants' situation, the Turkish state's security concerns were also influential in changing the nature of the relevant policies. It was already noted earlier that DITIB was founded in 1984 to counter the powerful position of Islamist groups in Germany such as the IGMG and the VIKZ, which, at the time, were considered by Turkey as radical groups. Curtailing the influence of these groups was, however, not the only function of DITIB. It also assumed the task of directly providing religious and cultural services to the migrant population.<sup>30</sup> In a way, this constituted a shift from the earlier period, when *Diyanet* had taken care of the same task while based in Turkey. Despite this spatial shift, however, DITIB has had close ties with the Turkish *Diyanet* since its founding. The President of *Diyanet* serves as the honorary chairman and the Chairman of the Advisory Board of DITIB.<sup>31</sup> The organization is officially presided

over by a high-ranking *Diyanet* official who is sent abroad as a religious attaché of the Turkish embassy and appointed to serve a four-year term. Moreover, *imams* are sent to Germany from Turkey as well.<sup>32</sup>

Even though the second phase of Turkish policy-making was overwhelmingly shaped by the above-mentioned supply-driven factors, that is, a changing perception about the temporality of the migrants' situation and changing security concerns of the Turkish state, it is important to not overlook the demands of migrants as well. Throughout the 1990s, during their meetings with Turkish officials, migrants often voiced a strong interest in the Turkish state's active involvement in addressing their concerns in Germany. The minutes of the meetings that took place in Berlin in December 1992 between Turkish authorities and the migrants validate this. The decision of the Turkish authorities to travel to Germany was triggered by the deadly attacks in Mölln that targeted Turkish citizens earlier that same year. Central to the meeting were issues such as “the lack of equal recognition in Germany despite having lived for almost thirty years in Germany,” “the security problem,” “the lack of political participation especially in the local elections in Germany,” and “discriminatory attitudes within German society.”<sup>33</sup> The activity report of the Turkish Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Commission, which organized the meetings, concluded that there was a strong demand within the population for the “Turkish state, parliament and affiliated institutions, as well as media to actively engage with and support citizens abroad.”<sup>34</sup>

### Toward Making a Muslim “Diaspora”: Government–Civil Society Partnership

The period between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s witnessed a turn in the Turkish state's attitude in the form of depicting problems and policy areas. The aim was to address the needs of the migrant population — not only for issues concerning Turkey but also those concerning their countries of residence — as well as to counter the activities of groups that Turkey considered to be radical at the time. Given the

27 Reports are available (in Turkish) at: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyoininsanhaklari/index.htm> (accessed 20 November 2018).

28 Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany* (London: Routledge, 2003).

29 Mencütek and Baser, “Mobilizing Diasporas” (see note 26), 92.

30 Matthias Rohe, *Report on the Religious Instruction at Public Schools in Hessen in Cooperation with DITIB* (in German) (2017), 18–38. Website of the Ministry of Education, Federated State of Hessen, [https://www.hessen.de/sites/default/files/media/prof.\\_dr.\\_mathias\\_rohe\\_-\\_islamwissenschaftliches\\_gutachten\\_ditib\\_hessen\\_fuer\\_hkm\\_2017.pdf](https://www.hessen.de/sites/default/files/media/prof._dr._mathias_rohe_-_islamwissenschaftliches_gutachten_ditib_hessen_fuer_hkm_2017.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2018). Also see *Islamic Organizations in Europe and the USA: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Matthias Kortmann and Kerstin Rosenow-Williams (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013).

31 See Rohe, *Report on the Religious Instruction* (see note 30), 22.

32 See Yurdakul, *From Guest Workers to Muslims* (see note 5), 89.

33 See [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyoininsanhaklari/docs/21dnm/mart1\\_1991\\_agustos30\\_1992.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyoininsanhaklari/docs/21dnm/mart1_1991_agustos30_1992.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2018), 60–70.

34 *Ibid.*

highly volatile political situation in Turkey, however, the latter focus overrode the former, rendering policy-making disorganized. Only in the late 2000s did an institutionally organized policy-making, in accordance with the global surge in diaspora policies, start to gain prominence.<sup>35</sup> Lobbying was used as a tool to remake the national community outside of Turkey’s borders along religious-cultural lines and to further foreign policy interests, thereby complementing and perhaps even motivating this institutionalized policy outlook. The last decade of policy-making in this respect marks another important juncture. Such a change can be observed in the increasing deployment – both in government documents and also in academic writings – of the term “diaspora” when referring to migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children. The main feature of this third phase is the formation of a Muslim (and Turkish) diaspora, on the one hand, and advocating the social, economic, and political participation of migrants into their countries of residence, on the other hand.

For the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, a separate government institution was founded in 2010 in order to plan, coordinate, and implement policies and programs targeting Turkish citizens abroad, “kinship communities” broadly defined by religious unity, and international students. The YTB was established in 2010 under the aegis of the office of the prime minister, which was abolished under Turkey’s new presidential system, and now operates under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.<sup>36</sup> Its organizational structure includes nine units.<sup>37</sup> Among these, the strategy development, personnel, and support services units are managed by the YTB’s president. Besides the president, there are two vice presidents, each of whom manages three of the remaining six units: Citizens Abroad, Cultural and Social Relations, Institutional Relations and Communication, International Students, Information Tech-

nology, and Legal Units. In 2017, the YTB employed a total of 287 part- and full-time workers.<sup>38</sup>

The organization has three main objectives concerning its activities targeting Turkish citizens abroad:<sup>39</sup> i) improving the sense of belonging in the homeland; ii) preservation of the mother tongue as well as culture, and identity; and iii) improving the social standing of the Turkish diaspora in their countries of residence. According to an interview conducted in 2014 with the then-head of the organization, these three objectives are expected to contribute to the formation of an “active citizenship” that will foster the participation of Turkish migrants in the societies where they live without them having to lose their cultural heritage.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, the YTB’s activities fall under the following themes: education and Turkish language; cultural mobility; human rights and law; family and social services; civil initiatives; economy and employment; and pre-school bilingual training.<sup>41</sup> An overwhelming majority of these activities cater to youth (mainly those who were born in the 1990s) and children. Activities in the area of education include weekend schools; an MA program in affiliated universities in Turkey to train Turkish language instructors to be sent abroad; fellowships for citizens abroad to support research on the migrant population and to support academic and intellectual participation; special quotas in Turkish universities for the migrant population; human rights education programs in Turkey; and last but not least, pre-school bilingual education programs.

In addition, the YTB also organizes – within the context of the cultural mobility theme – heritage trips to Turkey, such as the Evliya Çelebi Anatolia Culture Events; internships for Turkish migrant youth at Turkish government institutions; the diaspora youth academy, which started its activities in 2013; a special quota for Turkish migrant youth at the annual camps organized by the Ministry of Education; and youth camps that are organized in Turkey specifically for Turkish youth abroad.

35 Francesco Ragazzi, “A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies”, *Political Geography* 41 (2015): 74–89.

36 Website of the State News Agency *TRT Haber*, “Three Organizations Now Operate under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture” (in Turkish), 15 July 2018, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/kultur-ve-turizm-bakanligina-uc-yeni-kurulus-baglandi-375391.html> (accessed 23 April 2019).

37 For the organizational structure of the YTB, see <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/teskilat-semasi> (accessed 23 April 2019).

38 YTB, *Organization’s Activity Report* (2017), [https://ytbweb1.blob.core.windows.net/files/documents/2017\\_FAAL\\_YET\\_RAPORU\\_Digital.pdf](https://ytbweb1.blob.core.windows.net/files/documents/2017_FAAL_YET_RAPORU_Digital.pdf) (accessed 23 April 2019).

39 Aydın, *The New Turkish Diaspora Policy* (see note 9).

40 “Human Right and Universal Values Cannot Be Confined to the Borders of One Country!” (in Turkish), *Perspektif* 236 (December 2014): 38–41. *Perspektif* is the monthly magazine published by the IGMG.

41 YTB, *Organization’s Activity Report* (see note 38), 40–47.

Besides the activities listed above, the YTB has also recently started providing two particular fellowships: one for developing expertise in legal issues around discrimination, and the other for the provision of family and social services, which have increasingly become a focal point of diaspora policies in the last couple of years. The Ministry of Family and Social Policies, for instance, opened attachés in Düsseldorf and Cologne in 2015 within the institutional structure of the Turkish consulates.<sup>42</sup> These offices arguably contribute to the extension of welfare provisions outside of Turkey's borders. The migrant population and their children are entitled, for instance, to birth and child support, which were enacted in Turkey in 2015.<sup>43</sup>

All of these activities provided by the YTB are available to Turkish citizens abroad and to Blue Card holders alike. In line with the new changes introduced to the citizenship law in 2009, the Blue Card has replaced what previously used to be the Pink Card.<sup>44</sup> The former preserves the rights that the latter had already granted to those who renounced their citizenship with the permission of the Turkish state. In contrast to the Pink Card, however, the Blue Card extends the right to public employment in Turkey on a temporary and contractual basis. Moreover, the Blue Card holders can make use of the state contribution to voluntary pension schemes if they choose to enroll in a scheme that is based in Turkey. They can also enroll on a voluntary basis in social insurance and pension schemes in Turkey.

The YTB organizes these activities in cooperation with various ministries in Turkey, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. *Diyanet* and DITIB are also active participants in YTB projects.<sup>45</sup> The main emphasis in the design and implementation of projects is the partnership with civil society organizations, both in Turkey and abroad. The usual procedure is that civil society organizations, including universities, apply to be project partners. The Presidency provides funding and institutional support. One example is the cooperation agreement that the YTB signed with Sakarya Uni-

versity in Turkey to start an MA program to train Turkish language instructors.<sup>46</sup> Those who have completed their undergraduate degrees abroad in education and social sciences can apply to the program. Another such project is the pre-school bilingual education project, which was proposed to the YTB in 2014 by the European Research Center at Akdeniz University. In the context of the same project, the YTB also cooperated with Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly, the emphasis on the YTB's activities on civil society partnerships seems to address an existing demand among migrants that was often voiced in their meetings with Turkish officials throughout the 1990s. Even though the civic capacities of migrants significantly developed in the 1980s and 1990s, as mentioned earlier, the associational realm remained divided along ideological, ethnic, and religious cleavages. The necessity to have unified and better organized Turkish civil society actors geared toward more effective claims-making was a pressing concern among migrants during the 1990s. For instance, this demand was voiced during a visit by Turkish Members of Parliament (MPs) in November 1999. During the visit of the Turkish MPs in February 2001, a request to start a Turkish Council was also voiced. Even though the demand for a more unified civil society continues,<sup>48</sup> the systematization and institutionalization of policy-making through the activities of the YTB and with the participation of civil society actors were arguably timely, strategic moves to address the prevailing concerns.

42 "Family Attachés Are Being Opened in Four Cities in Germany" (in Turkish), *Hürriyet*, 12 March 2017.

43 "Can Mothers Abroad Apply for Birth Support?" (in Turkish), *Diaspora Haber*, 16 July 2018.

44 See [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/mavi-kart\\_eski-pembe-kart\\_uygulamasi-tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/mavi-kart_eski-pembe-kart_uygulamasi-tr.mfa) (accessed 10 December 2018).

45 YTB, *Organization's Activity Report* (see note 38), 50–51.

46 *Ibid.*, 44–45.

47 *Ibid.*, 42–43.

48 TV Channel *Kanal Avrupa*, 13 October 2018, Perspective (in Turkish), TV discussion with Tamer Cansız, the General Secretary of the UID, and Gönül Eğlence, the head of the Essen organization of the Alliance 90/The Greens, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBs2L-WRte0> (accessed 10 December 2018).



# Understanding Voting Patterns

The introduction of voting from abroad should be understood within the context of this third phase of policy-making. Changes introduced into existing election law in 2008, and the subsequent completion in 2012 of the necessary measures, made voting at the ballot boxes stationed in the countries of residence possible for all Turkish passport holders over the age of 18.<sup>49</sup> Even though Turkish citizens living abroad had been eligible to vote since 1987, turnout rates remained low due to financial and logistical difficulties of people having to cast their votes at the ballot stations installed at Turkish airports and border controls.

**External voting became a pressing demand during the 1990s, often voiced by migrants in their encounters with Turkish government officials.**

In fact, external voting became a pressing demand during the 1990s, often voiced by migrants in their encounters with Turkish government officials.<sup>50</sup> The first provision for voting abroad was introduced on July 23, 1995, following a constitutional amendment approved by the coalition government of the time.<sup>51</sup> Even though this amendment allowed Turkish citizens abroad to vote, the required additional electoral legislation for determining applicable measures for its implementation was not pursued by the political actors at the time. Only in 2012 did all the necessary

<sup>49</sup> Amendments to the Election Law, Law No. 5749, dated March 13, 2008, available at <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2008/03/20080322M1-3.htm> (accessed 27 May 2019). Also see Zeynep Sahin Mencütek and Seyma Akyol Yilmaz, *Turkey's Experience with Voting from Abroad in the 2014 and 2015 Elections*, Rethink Paper 24 (Washington, D.C.: Rethink Institute, October 2015), 3.

<sup>50</sup> One of the earliest official records of the demand by citizens abroad for the right to vote was a parliamentary proposal in 1971 entitled "Workers Abroad and Problems". See Zeynep Sahin Mencütek and M. Murat Erdogan, "The Implementation of Voting from Abroad: Evidence from the 2014 Turkish Presidential Election", *International Migration*, 54(3), 2016, 178.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

measures come to a completion. During the 2014 presidential elections, Turkish citizens abroad cast their votes for the first time at the ballot boxes stationed in their countries of residence.

## Voting Behavior in Numbers<sup>52</sup>

Since then, they have voted in three parliamentary elections (June 7, 2015; November 1, 2015, and June 24, 2018), one presidential election (June 24, 2018), and one referendum (April 16, 2017). The number of registered voters abroad increased between the 2014 presidential election and the June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, from about 2.8 million to 3 million. During the same period, the voter turnout rate abroad also increased, from 18.9 percent to 50 percent. Around half of the registered voters outside of Turkey reside in Germany, where the number of registered voters remained relatively stable during the period between 2014 and 2018; yet the turnout rate, parallel to the overall trend abroad, considerably increased. As Table 1 (page 16) demonstrates, only 18.93 percent<sup>53</sup> of the eligible voters in Germany voted in the 2014 presidential election, whereby the same ratio jumped to 45.7 percent in the 2018 presidential/parliamentary election.

Besides this striking increase in the voter turnout rate abroad in general – and in Germany, in particular – the high vote shares gained abroad by both the AKP and the pro-Kurdish and leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) also deserve attention. In all

<sup>52</sup> All the numbers in this section are compiled by the author using the statistics available at the website of the Higher Election Council in Turkey, <http://www.ysk.gov.tr> (accessed 10 December 2018). The Higher Election Council is the main state institution that is responsible for the oversight and logistics of elections.

<sup>53</sup> There were 8.15 percent who cast their votes in Germany, whereby 10.8 percent did so at the ballot boxes stationed at the airports and border transits. The Higher Council of Election provides a country breakdown of the actual votes cast at the borders only for the 2014 elections.

of the three parliamentary elections between 2014 and 2018, both the AKP and the HDP gained a higher share of the votes abroad than they did in Turkey. In the June 2018 parliamentary elections, for instance, the AKP’s vote share within Turkey was 42.56 percent, whereby it was 51.73 percent abroad. Similarly, the HDP gained 11.7 percent of the votes in Turkey, whereby its vote share abroad was 17.31 percent. A similar trend was also visible in the June and November 2015 elections.

Table 1

**Voter turnout rate in Germany**

2014 presidential	18.93
June 2015 parliamentary	33.40
November 2015 parliamentary	39.80
2017 referendum	45.84
June 2018 parliamentary and presidential	45.70

The AKP’s vote share in Germany (similar to that in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria) was higher than its overall vote share abroad. In the June 2018 elections, the party gained 56.3 percent of the votes in Germany (63.35 percent in the Netherlands, 65.08 percent in Belgium, and 63.24 percent in Austria). The trend was similar in the June 2015 elections as well, with the AKP gaining 53.65 percent of the votes in Germany (and between 60 and 65 percent in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria).<sup>54</sup>

Within Germany, on the other hand, the AKP won the highest share of votes in all the consular areas, as can be seen in Table 2: as low as 44 percent (in Berlin during June 7, 2015 elections) and as high as 70 percent (in Münster in November 1, 2015 elections). The second most-popular party across Germany was either the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), or the HDP. On the other hand, the vote

54 The HDP, on the other hand, gained significantly more votes in Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, and the United Kingdom than its average votes abroad. In the June 2018 elections, the HDP’s vote share was 37.27 percent in Sweden, 40.96 percent in Switzerland, 48.2 percent in Finland, and 49.34 percent in the United Kingdom. A similar trend was also seen in the June 2015 elections, with the HDP gaining 43.19 percent of the votes in Sweden, 47.51 percent in Switzerland, 57.8 percent in Finland, and 59.31 percent in the United Kingdom.

share of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which went into an alliance with the AKP in the 2018 elections, has fluctuated within the range of 7–11 percent.

**Why Are External Votes Important for Political Parties?**

External voting has had an effect on the outcomes of both parliamentary and presidential elections as well as the 2017 referendum.<sup>55</sup> For the latter two, external votes are directly added to the total number of votes cast within Turkey. Their effects on the outcomes of the 2018 presidential elections and the 2017 referendum were significant. For instance, President Erdoğan’s vote share in Turkey in the 2018 presidential election amounted to 50.8 percent of the total, barely giving him a win in the first round. Combined with the 894,585 votes cast for him from abroad, he won 52.59 percent of the eligible votes. Similarly, external votes were also quite influential in the 2017 referendum, constituting around 19 percent (256,000) of the total difference (1.37 million votes) between the YES and the NO votes.

**For parliamentary elections, votes cast abroad have a dual effect.**

For parliamentary elections, votes cast abroad have a dual effect. The first concerns the number of parliamentary seats that a party can win. The number of valid votes cast from abroad are distributed among electoral districts by using the proportion of valid external votes to those of valid internal votes as a base. Once the exact number of external votes that each district gets is calculated, this number is distributed among political parties in proportion to their overall vote share abroad. Given that the AKP won the highest share of votes abroad — but also higher than what it gained within Turkey — it benefited the most from external voting. For instance, the votes cast from abroad gave the AKP three additional seats in the November 2015 parliamentary elections.

55 “Responsibilities of the City Election Councils and Fundamentals and Principles of Counting External Votes” (in Turkish), *Resmi Gazete*, 3 April 2015, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2015/04/20150403-11.pdf> (accessed 23 April 2019).

Table 2

**Political parties' vote share within Germany**

		<i>AKP</i>	<i>MHP</i>	<i>CHP</i>	<i>HDP</i>
Berlin	June 7, 2015	43.92%	8.09%	23.60%	20.48%
	November 1, 2015	48.46%	6.30%	22.60%	19.48%
	June 24, 2018	45.30%	6.06%	22.40%	20.12%
Dusseldorf	June 7, 2015	59.49%	11.36%	13.10%	13.58%
	November 1, 2015	64.60%	8.84%	12.30%	12.56%
	June 24, 2018	59.85%	9.78%	12.72%	11.66%
Essen	June 7, 2015	61.93%	10.63%	10.53%	14.35%
	November 1, 2015	67.11%	7.41%	16.18%	12.87%
	June 24, 2018	66.45%	8.51%	9.43%	10.69%
Frankfurt	June 7, 2015	47.72%	9.80%	17.28%	21.87%
	November 1, 2015	54.36%	7.41%	16.19%	20.25%
	June 24, 2018	50.82%	8.38%	17.03%	18.44%
Hamburg	June 7, 2015	50.21%	8.25%	18.02%	20.95%
	November 1, 2015	54.36%	6.41%	17.07%	19.79%
	June 24, 2018	50.90%	7.34%	17.24%	19.26%
Hannover	June 7, 2015	47.63%	7.95%	16.04%	25.32%
	November 1, 2015	53.90%	6.61%	14.79%	22.98%
	June 24, 2018	53.13%	6.91%	15.72%	19.18%
Karlsruhe	June 7, 2015	53.69%	8.33%	16.09%	18.86%
	November 1, 2015	60.02%	6.56%	14.33%	17.38%
	June 24, 2018	55.06%	8.02%	16.03%	15.93%
Cologne	June 7, 2015	54.44%	9.05%	15.11%	18.83%
	November 1, 2015	60.80%	6.84%	14.05%	16.84%
	June 24, 2018	56.84%	8.58%	14.10%	15.44%
Mainz	June 7, 2015	55.01%	7.63%	13.26%	21.92%
	November 1, 2015	59.55%	6.02%	11.92%	20.79%
	June 24, 2018	55.58%	8.13%	14.11%	17.26%
Munich	June 7, 2015	57.78%	10.39%	21.07%	9.22%
	November 1, 2015	63.35%	7.54%	19.14%	8.00%
	June 24, 2018	56.05%	8.91%	20.03%	8.46%
Münster	June 7, 2015	65.72%	7.57%	11.35%	12.48%
	November 1, 2015	71.05%	5.80%	10.27%	11.25%
	June 24, 2018	59.14%	6.89%	14.74%	14.49%
Nuremberg	June 7, 2015	46.39%	13.29%	23.56%	13.14%
	November 1, 2015	54.76%	10.21%	21.26%	11.44%
	June 24, 2018	49.19%	9.56%	22.42%	11.16%
Stuttgart	June 7, 2015	55.05%	11.91%	12.50%	17.07%
	November 1, 2015	60.89%	9.34%	11.92%	15.21%
	June 24, 2018	57.61%	10.08%	13.04%	13.26%

The second effect of external voting has to do with the 10 percent electoral threshold. In order to win parliamentary seats, parties need to gain at least 10 percent of the total number of valid votes, which is a sum of the external and internal votes. External votes were significant in getting the HDP into parliament in the November 2015 election, the threshold of which was 4.78 million votes. The HDP gained 4.91 million votes from within Turkey, barely helping it to pass the threshold. In this respect, the 234,000 votes that it won abroad were considerably effective.

Beyond their material implications, external votes are also symbolically important. Easing the ability to vote from abroad by providing the necessary legislation was an important part of the Turkish state's concerted efforts, at the heart of which lies the formation of a diaspora population that preserves its religious and linguistic heritage. Mobilizing constituencies to vote was, in this respect, perceived by the ruling AKP as an important catalyst toward this end. In an interview in 2015, the then-president of the YTB noted the following:

Twenty-seven percent of the migrant population is between the ages of 18 and 30. Socialization of this group mostly happened abroad. Similarly, the proportion of the Turkey-born population is acceleratingly decreasing vis-à-vis the proportion of the foreign-born population. Taking these two factors into account, we can say that the voter turnout rate is proportional to the migrant population's ability to preserve their social identity and to continue their belonging in the homeland.<sup>56</sup>

Strikingly, the youth are seen by AKP officials as the primary means for bringing about an imagined diaspora population. The overwhelming presence of youth-related projects in the YTB's activities is arguably not random and will likely continue in the coming years. A statement by Zafer Sarıkaya, who acted as the former president of the UID until his election in the 2018 parliamentary elections as one of the Istanbul MPs of the AKP, validates this:<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> "What Do First of November Elections Mean for the Diaspora?" (in Turkish), *Perspektif* 246 (December 2015): 11–13.

<sup>57</sup> "Sirakaya Has Already Started Working towards a Strong Diaspora" (in Turkish), *Mahumat* 24, 11 July 2018, <https://zafersirakaya.com/sirakaya-guclu-diaspora-icin-kollari-sivadi/> (accessed 1 December 2018). *Mahumat* is an online news portal; their main audience is the migrant population.

We will continue our hard work to strengthen the youths' [sense of] belonging in the motherland. Young generations are indeed our future. We will hand our motherland to them. For this reason, the youth abroad carry special importance. We will make graduate fellowships more common in order to contribute to their education and specialization. To this end, we will also double the quotas that are specifically allocated in the Turkish universities for the youth abroad. In addition, we will increase internship opportunities in our country [Turkey]. We will introduce new modules into the Turkish public employment system in order to increase employment opportunities in public institutions. We pay special attention so that our people abroad, and especially the youth, do not drift away from our culture. We will continue our efforts toward the fulfillment of this aspiration. One of our projects, in this regard, is to organize trips bringing 100,000 young people to our country in order to introduce them to our culture and history. One of the bases of our culture is language. For this reason, we will support the opening of bilingual schools. In addition, we will also diversify and increase projects but also project funding so that our children can learn their mother tongue. We will also encourage the launching of culturally sensitive and compatible nursing homes.

### Diversity in Voting Preferences beyond the Numbers

Unsurprisingly, the AKP uniquely dedicated a significant part of its election campaign in 2018 to its "diaspora policies."<sup>58</sup> In a speech he delivered in Sarajevo in May 2018 at the sixth annual meeting of the UID, President Erdoğan noted the following:

In order to deal with the problems of our citizens living abroad, we have founded the YTB. We have also enabled our citizens' access to the state institutions, regardless of their location, by increasing the number of consulates and embassies. We always support our citizens' involvement in civil society activities. We are now in the process of estab-

<sup>58</sup> See the PDF document of AKP candidate Mustafa Yeneroglu for member of parliament, [http://www.mustafayeneroglu.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AKParti\\_YSKM\\_SecimBeyannamesi.pdf](http://www.mustafayeneroglu.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AKParti_YSKM_SecimBeyannamesi.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2018).

lishing the Citizens Abroad Coordination Council in order to facilitate the activities of different institutions and improve the coordination among them. We are also planning to start in the consular regions abroad Advisory Boards, which will be directed by the YTB and involve our citizens abroad. We will also work toward the foundation within the Parliament of a “Citizens Abroad Commission.”<sup>59</sup>

As part of the AKP’s election campaign, in early June 2018, Turkish consulates were reported to have sent letters signed by President Erdoğan to registered citizens living in Germany. These letters asked for support for the AKP and Erdoğan in return for the services provided to the citizens abroad.<sup>60</sup> Important to note here is that, even though no other political party systematically addressed in its election campaign the “diaspora,” as did the AKP, opposition parties also campaigned abroad to mobilize their base to vote. Nevertheless, lacking a competitive advantage — given the institutional, organizational, and financial capacity that the AKP has built in the last decade through the deployment of state resources and civil society actors/networks within and outside of Turkey — opposition parties entered the race at a significantly disadvantaged position.

Close to 90 percent of the Turkish media landscape is politically or financially dependent on the AKP government.<sup>61</sup> Since the sale of the Doğan media group to the pro-government conglomerate Demirören Holding in 2018, nine of the ten most-watched TV channels and nine of the ten most-read national newspapers are owned by pro-government companies.<sup>62</sup> It is not only the near-to-full control over the

media but also the strong centralization of public finances that has given the AKP an unfair advantage vis-à-vis the opposition parties. One prominent example of this is the AKP’s strategic deployment of the central government budget to funnel excludable goods to pro-party districts in Turkey as well as targeting higher expenditure amounts, particularly in the area of education.<sup>63</sup>

Outside of Turkey, the AKP’s competitive advantage has, to a significant extent, been the result of its claimed ownership over the policies targeting migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children. Such a claim owes its power to the increasingly blurred boundaries between the political party and the state institutions. An additional factor that has contributed to the realization of this claim has been the conflation of the associational and political realms. Increasingly close contact between the party, state institutions, and civil society actors has created a patronage network that includes old and new associations with close ties to the AKP government, such as DITIB and the UID.

### **It should not be overlooked that voting patterns in Germany remained diverse.**

Yet, it should also not be overlooked that voting patterns in Germany remained diverse. Even more significant is that this was despite the AKP’s competitive advantage over opposition parties in its access to, and mobilization of, the constituents. The variation in voting behaviors is best manifest in the vote shares of the AKP and the three main opposition parties, as the previous section on voting behavior demonstrated. Political party choices to a large extent reflect the historical variation in migration patterns, that is, the left-leaning and pro-Kurdish HDP seems to garner most of its support from those who came to Germany in the 1980s and the 1990s on political grounds. Among its constituencies are also students and those who recently came to Germany in the aftermath of

<sup>59</sup> See <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/haberler/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-yurt-disinda-yasayan-vatandaslara-mujde> (accessed 3 December 2018).

<sup>60</sup> *Turkish Consulates in Germany Send Erdoğan Propaganda Letter to Expatriates* (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 10 June 2018), <https://stockholmcf.org/turkish-consulates-in-germany-send-erdogan-propaganda-letter-to-expatriates/> (accessed 1 August 2018).

<sup>61</sup> “The Total Collapse of Freedom, Pluralism and Diversity in Turkey’s Mainstream Media”, *Media Policy Project Blog*, 24 September 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2018/09/24/the-total-collapse-of-freedom-pluralism-and-diversity-in-turkeys-mainstream-media/> (accessed 13 February 2019).

<sup>62</sup> “Dogan Media Group Sale Completes Control of Turkish Media”, *Reporters without Borders*, 22 March 2018. See <https://>

[rsf.org/en/news/dogan-media-group-sale-completes-government-control-turkish-media](https://www.rsf.org/en/news/dogan-media-group-sale-completes-government-control-turkish-media) (accessed 13 February 2019).

<sup>63</sup> Melani Cammett and Davide Luca, *Unfair Play: Central Government Spending under Turkey’s AK Party* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 20 June 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/20/unfair-play-central-government-spending-under-turkeys-ak-party/> (accessed 13 February 2019).

the 2016 putsch, again on political grounds. The AKP, on the other hand, has a stronger base among those who came in the 1960s as guest workers. However, among the first arrivals, it is also possible to find HDP and CHP supporters, just as it is also possible to come across AKP constituencies among those who came after the 1980s.

### What Explains the Support and/or Sympathy for the AKP?

The popularity of the AKP and President Erdoğan in Germany among migrants from Turkey and their children is often explained by “loyalty to Turkey” and a “lack of democratic culture.” In addition to the methodological problems and conceptual issues related to the ambiguities surrounding terms such as “loyalty” and “democratic culture,” these explanations say very little about the causal mechanisms behind the support and/or sympathy for the AKP and President Erdoğan. Failing to explain the perceptions and motivations of the Turkish voters in Germany, these accounts risk interpreting political attitudes on the basis of essentialist and essentializing biases.

The empirical information provided in this section is based on life history interviews that the author conducted over the course of a year in 2017/2018 with migrants from Turkey and their Germany-born children. In total, 18 interviews (selected through snowball sampling) were conducted with first- and second-generation migrants. The shortest interview was 45 minutes, whereby the longest one lasted for two hours. In addition, the author also conducted two focus groups that exclusively included women. The random sample of interviewees used in this study represents a diverse group by ethnicity, religion, religiosity, time of arrival, and legal status. The author also regularly attended events organized by various migrant associations and conducted participatory observations during the 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections.

Even though it is not representative, the qualitative data collected suggests that there is both a material and an emotional basis to the support that the AKP and President Erdoğan garnered from voters in Germany. Socio-economic changes and perceived improvements in the quality of services at various state institutions, both within Turkey and Germany, created a positive image of the party in the eyes of its constituencies. Moreover, a strong sense of pride

sustained by the rhetoric of a “strong Turkey,” which is perceived to be represented in the charismatic persona of President Erdoğan and experienced through the expansive diaspora policies, seems to drive the emotional basis of the electoral support for the AKP and Erdoğan.

### Contra to the conventional wisdom, religiosity is not the primary motivation to vote in favor of the AKP.

Contra to the conventional wisdom, religiosity is not the primary motivation to vote in favor of the AKP. Many pro-AKP constituents, especially the older ones, seem to perceive the party as a continuation of the previous center-right political parties such as the Democrat Party, the Justice Party, the True Path Party, and the Motherland Party, rather than an Islamist party. Even though piety is an important feature of the everyday lives of many AKP constituents, it does not motivate political preferences as much as it shapes socialization patterns. One striking example of this, for instance, is the increasing discomfort in the last couple of years within the Milli Görüş circles of the AKP government.<sup>64</sup> Yet, especially in times of crisis, such as the tension between the Netherlands and Turkey right before the 2017 referendum, a strong fear of losing social and political gains seems to have pushed even the Islamist constituencies with critical attitudes of the AKP and Erdoğan to strategically vote for the AKP.

### Material Benefits and Perceived Improvements in Well-being

Perceived socio-economic improvements and better service provision, both inside and outside of Turkey, seem to play an important role in the electoral support given to the AKP and President Erdoğan. Until recently, Turkey’s economic development under AKP rule has been a source of awe for many observers, inside and outside of Turkey. The AKP rose to power in 2002 after one of the worst economic crises had hit the country, in 2001. After that, up until 2016, gross domestic product per capita increased from \$9,090 to

64 “The AKP Parliamentarian’s Reaction to Milli Gazete” (in Turkish), *Hürriyet*, 2 January 2017, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ak-parti-milletvekilinden-milli-gazeteye-tepki-40324573> (accessed 13 February 2019).

\$25,655.<sup>65</sup> Turkey's rapid economic growth over the course of the last 15 years has been facilitated, among other things, by a boom in the construction sector. During this period, the sector has transformed the skyline of Istanbul and many other cities, also contributing significantly to the development of transportation infrastructure.<sup>66</sup>

Especially for the older generations, Turkey's economic growth since the early 2000s seems to have garnered support for — or at least sympathy toward — the ruling AKP. It is important to keep in mind that most of the first-generation economic migrants and their children who either came to Germany at a very early age or were born in Germany spend quite a considerable time of the year in Turkey and remain active beneficiaries of the Turkish welfare system. It is not uncommon for them to often compare the socio-economic situation in the 1960s and 1970s with the socio-economic changes since the 2000s.

These comparisons take multiple forms. Inter-city highways seem to be conceived as the hallmark of Turkey's economic development under AKP rule. "Better" and "faster" access to healthcare services is another important reference point in the juxtapositions made between today's Turkey and the Turkey that they came from, from what they remember.<sup>67</sup> Another noticeable point of attention is the perceived improvements in the quality of services provided at various state institutions. The interviewees often emphasized the increased efficiency at government offices since the early 2000s, together with positive changes in the attitudes of public employees — from "maltreatment" to "more humane" and "kind" interactions:

<sup>65</sup> See the OECD data on Turkey's economic indicators at <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm> (accessed 22 November 2018).

<sup>66</sup> See <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/turkeys-construction-sector-maintain-its-significant-role-economy-several-large-projects-under-way> (accessed 22 November 2018).

<sup>67</sup> Unlike many other low- and middle-income countries, Turkey under AKP rule has managed to transform the healthcare system toward universal and equitable coverage of all citizens. See Susan Powers Sparkes et al., "Political Strategies for Health Reform in Turkey: Extending Veto Point Theory", *Health Systems and Reform* 1, no. 4 (2015): 263–75. Also see Volkan Yilmaz, *The Politics of Healthcare Reform in Turkey* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Fifteen to twenty years ago, obtaining an identification card or having any transaction done at a government office was very difficult. Back in 1997, I had to inquire about my father's pension in Turkey. I went to seven different government offices and received seven different answers. Then, I called my father to ask him to take care of it himself. Gathering the necessary information took him only 10 minutes. I figured out later that the public employees did not take me seriously and were poking at me because I was young. When you go to a government office today, civil servants are polite and try to help you as much as they can. We sometimes make a blunder because of not knowing the Turkish culture well. Nevertheless, the officer does not treat you badly, unlike the case in the past.

Socio-economic developments and perceived improvements in service provision seemed to have played an essential role in garnering support from constituencies that historically voted for political parties of the center-right as well. In fact, the AKP's success in consolidating power was, to a large extent, connected to its political ability to embrace large and diverse societal sectors as well as to distinguish itself, especially in the early 2000s, from the Islamist tradition that it came out of. This seems to have gained the trust of constituents who were rather suspicious of political Islam:

My mother was, at the beginning, skeptical of Erdoğan. She was scared that he would be like Necmettin Erbakan [the founder of the Milli Görüş movement in Turkey, and several Islamist parties that came out of it]. Yet, afterwards, she realized that this was not the case. The AKP was also different at the beginning. They did a lot of reforms, infrastructural investments, etc. We used to go to Turkey quite a lot. The roads have changed. The city that my mum comes from changed. My parents attributed all these changes to the AKP. They used to say that they were treated "at the municipalities very well" as opposed to "the case before."

Outside of Turkey, consulates seem to be one of the key places where constituents experienced these perceived manifold changes in public service provision. In addition to the YTB and its cooperation with civil society actors, consulates have also become central

actors in the third phase of Turkish policy-making.<sup>68</sup> The digitalization of citizenship services over the last decade has provided the Turkish migrant population and their children with easy and fast access to services such as population registry, passport renewal/extension, visa applications, etc. Getting access to the internet portal that provides online access to these services is possible after obtaining an identification number and a password from within a consulate. These changes in service provision, together with the growing level of cooperation with civil society actors, in essence reflect Turkey's changing foreign policy outlook since the AKP came into power.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, during the period between 2002 and 2015, the number of consulates increased from 55 to 81, and that of the embassies increased from 91 to 134.<sup>70</sup> The main premise of the new foreign policy outlook is that public diplomacy involves "state-citizen" relations, on the one hand, and "citizen-citizen" relations, on the other.<sup>71</sup>

Interestingly, according to the Turkish Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Commission activity reports, the improvement of consular services has been a popular demand since the 1990s. Before the AKP came into

68 "What Do Political Parties Promise to the Voters Abroad?" (in Turkish), *Perspektif* 241 (May 2015): 16–21.

69 Aydın, *The New Turkish Diaspora Policy* (see note 9), 12–13.

70 "65 Consulates in 13 Years: The Total Number of Embassies and Consulates Increased to 228" (in Turkish), in T. C. *Başbakanlık Kamu Diplomasisi Koordinatörlüğü*; see Aksel, "Turkey's Migrants and the Change in Policies" (see note 23).

71 Public diplomacy activities used to be coordinated by the Public Diplomacy Coordination Office, which was founded in 2010 under the prime ministerial office. Following the transition into the new presidential system, they are now conducted by the Directorate of Communications of the Turkish Presidency. Its mission is stated as follows: "to develop a holistic communication strategy at national and international level comprising all state institutions based on a concept of common language; and to carry out its functions on this basis. To share Turkey's policies, practices and approaches with public opinions and counterparts in a planned, continuous and effective manner, and to raise awareness. To monitor closely and evaluate media and think tanks, and to inform relevant authorities and public opinions in this context. To manage/improve relations with the press; to take steps to facilitate the professional activities of press members and to contribute to the development of the press. To arrange and conduct necessary activities and regulations for the effective management of the communication between the nation and state." See <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/vizyon-misyon> (accessed 15 May 2019).

power, in 2002, there were complaints, for instance, about the small sizes of the consulates and especially the maltreatment of citizens wearing headscarves by the personnel.<sup>72</sup> The perceived improvements in the quality and efficiency of consular services since the early 2000s seem to have contributed to the constituents' positive perceptions of the AKP.

## The Rhetoric of a Strong Turkey

Besides their material implications, constituencies' positive perceptions about the socio-economic changes under AKP rule and better service provision at various government institutions inside and outside of Turkey have also had emotional effects. A strong sense of pride — sustained by the rhetoric of a "strong Turkey," represented in the charismatic persona of President Erdoğan and experienced through the expansive diaspora policies — seems to have driven the emotional basis of the electoral support for the AKP and Erdoğan.

### Constituents seem to have perceived the institutionalization and systematization of diaspora policies as the material manifestation of an attentive and caring governance.

The institutionalization and systematization of diaspora policies under AKP rule seem to have been perceived by the constituencies as the material manifestation of what attentive and caring governance should look like. Consular services, for instance, stand as proof — in the eyes of the constituencies — to the increasing ability of the state to deliver on the demands of its citizens. Interestingly, this perception also resonates with the statements of political actors as well. For instance, during the first meeting of the "The Consultation Board of Citizens Abroad,"<sup>73</sup> in June

72 Website of the Human Rights Sub-Commission of the Turkish Parliament, 21st Executive Term, the 3rd and 4th Legislation Years (in Turkish), 149–151, [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/docs/21dnm/21yd\\_34yy\\_raporu.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/docs/21dnm/21yd_34yy_raporu.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2018).

73 The Consultation Board of Citizens Abroad functions in connection with the YTB. It was founded with the aim to design and implement policies that effectively and efficiently address the needs of the Turkish population abroad. Its members consist of the Turkish population across the globe. The Board holds annual meetings with civil society actors



2013, President Erdoğan noted that “a strong state is the one that attends to the needs of its own citizens, ethnic brothers, and friends.”<sup>74</sup> Arguably, statements like this have further contributed to the strengthening of perceptions about Turkey becoming a strong state under the leadership of Erdoğan.

President Erdoğan is indeed seen as the epitome of a strong Turkey, able to represent and defend its citizens abroad. He is regarded by the constituencies as a “fatherly” figure who is “well-respected” in the international arena, who “protects the interests of the migrants,” and who “delivers what he promises.” For instance, there is a common understanding that, ever since the AKP came into power, Turkish political actors have been received in Germany at the prime ministerial and presidential levels as opposed to the low-level diplomatic encounters that had taken place in the past. Moreover, many constituencies, including those who are not overt supporters of the AKP, also seem to applaud Erdoğan for “daring to challenge” European politicians:

I am neither a big fan of AKP nor Erdoğan, except for the fact that he dares to challenge them [referring to European and German political actors]. No other politician before him did such a thing. My mother used to tell me that her friends used to poke fun at her when Turkish politicians came to Germany, saying that they came to ask for money again. This is no longer the case. Turkey is progressing. Look at Greece, Italy and Spain. [...] The economic crisis hit Turkey as well but not as much as it harmed European economies. They are jealous of this fact. In addition, Erdoğan has no self-censorship when he interacts with European politicians. Of course, he speaks nonsense every now and then; but still, he dares to challenge.

It is not uncommon that this perceived change in the diplomatic encounters of Turkey — both in terms of status and rhetoric — is interpreted as a manifestation of Turkey’s changing position in global politics. Unsurprisingly, this view is also disseminated through pro-government media outlets. For instance, President Erdoğan’s last visit to Germany, in September 2018, was defined in one of the pro-government news-

and representatives from various government institutions in Turkey.

**74** “The Advisory Board of Citizens Abroad Met in Turkey” (in Turkish), *Perspektif* 223 (July – August 2013): 8 – 9.

papers as a meeting that would bring the relations between Turkey and Germany into a “higher league.”<sup>75</sup> The prevailing understanding that Turkey became stronger — and as a result, joined the “league of advanced nations” — seems to inspire a strong sense of pride among AKP constituents while also motivating negative and often suspicious interpretations of attitudes within Europe toward Turkey. The AKP constituencies often attribute the deterioration of EU-Turkey relations to the resentment that Turkey’s changing position in global politics has triggered in European countries in general, and among the German public in particular:

It seems like Europe sees the developments in Turkey as a threat to itself. Seeing this, one starts questioning why everything becomes a problem and a matter of criticism when Turkey is progressing. Of course, the constant criticism within Germany of what is happening in Turkey incites disappointment for the Turks here.

What drives such a strong sense of pride in Turkey under AKP rule and the leadership of Erdoğan is an important question. There is a widespread acceptance that diaspora communities often carry strong nationalist sentiments.<sup>76</sup> The Turkish diaspora is by no means an exception in this regard. Yet, the AKP constituencies’ tenacious appreciation of the party and the charismatic persona of Erdoğan can be explained not only by national pride. What seems to be at stake at this current moment has more to do with the challenge that the rhetoric of a “strong Turkey” poses to what is considered by the AKP constituency as the dominant understanding in Europe of Turkish people:

Europe cannot bring itself to accept a strong Turkey. They assume that Turkey is still that of the 1970s. Even if the country lacks European standards in politics, it is economically developed. Of course, Germans are not aware of these develop-

**75** “The Visit of President Erdoğan Will Carry the Relations with Germany to a ‘Higher League’” (in Turkish), *Yeni Akit*, 27 September 2018, <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/baskan-Erdoğanın-ziyareti-almanya-ile-iliskileri-bir-ust-ligecikaracak-522222.html> (accessed 13 February 2019).

**76** Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Amsterdam: Center for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 1992).

ments. They still look at Turks as “barbaric,” “parochial,” “backward,” and “poor.”

Apparently, the challenge posed by a “strong Turkey” — represented by Erdoğan’s charismatic personality and his “daring” style — helps repair an existing frustration among migrants and their Germany-born children about their social standing with in Germany. Many complain about lacking equal recognition, even if they carry German passports:

I obtained German citizenship when I was 18 years old. Since then, I always insisted on saying that I was a German citizen, only to realize that I was, in fact, not accepted as one. They do not accept you as a real German, even if you have German citizenship. Realizing the impossibility of being accepted, I have decided to say, at the age of 35, that I am Turkish. During that time, we changed houses, installed satellite TV receptors, and started to watch Turkish television. When I started to say that I was Turkish, I was told that I was German. I responded back saying that I had never been accepted as German. Integration should be two-sided. Germans perceive integration as assimilation.

In the eyes of especially the second-generation migrants, there appears to be a considerable gap between legal inclusion in Germany — via holding German citizenship — and social inclusion. Feelings of exclusion and misrecognition, expressed by the AKP constituency, do not come out of nowhere. They have a significant material basis. Among individuals of Turkish origin, unemployment rates are reportedly higher and education levels lower.<sup>77</sup> According to the findings of a recent report on discrimination experiences in Germany, individuals of Turkish origin — as well as those from the Middle East and North Africa region — are disadvantaged at a higher rate in the field of education as well as in the labor and housing markets.<sup>78</sup> The exact causes of this perceived and

<sup>77</sup> Cem Özdemir et al., *The Situation in Germany of Individuals with Turkish Origin: Assessments Commissioned by the Council of Experts on Immigration and Integration* (in German), (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2004), [https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Zuwanderungsrat/exp-oezdemir-zuwanderungsrat.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Zuwanderungsrat/exp-oezdemir-zuwanderungsrat.pdf?__blob=publicationFile) (accessed 13 February 2019).

<sup>78</sup> Steffan Beigang et al., “Discrimination Experiences in Germany”: *The Results of a Representative Survey and Those of a Second Survey with the Affected Population* (in German) (Federal

experienced discrimination are difficult to pinpoint, as migration backgrounds often intersect with other factors such as socio-economic status<sup>79</sup> and physical appearance — as in the case of wearing a headscarf or other manifestations of one’s religious affiliation.<sup>80</sup> Despite this difficulty, however, the AKP constituencies often attribute their experiences of discrimination to their religious backgrounds:

I was once having a conversation at the *Mensa* [university cafeteria] with friends about children’s names. I told them that the name was not that important for me as long as it is not a name forbidden by my religion. Even then, my friends told me that I had to adapt my attitudes. When will I be considered a full member of the society? Does it happen if I obtain German citizenship? Or if I change my name? Or if I get married to a German? Or if I convert to Christianity and start eating pork? When do such reactions come to an end? When will we be accepted fully? When I raised these questions, my friends responded saying that that this was not what they meant by “adapting.” But conversations always end up like this. Or, for instance, they tell you to go back. But I was born here. Where shall I go? “To where your parents came from,” they respond back. If you categorize me as such, I think to myself, why should I call myself German? You already place me within certain categories. Why do you, then, get upset when I say something that confirms these labels that you have already put on me? If everyone is a German, there will be no plurality in the society. They insist on turning an apple tree into a pearl tree. I refuse to accept this.

## Fear of Losing Social and Political Gains

The fear of losing the social and political gains that were achieved under AKP rule is another emotional mechanism that seems to have shaped the decision to vote in favor of the AKP. It has already been mentioned that the boundaries between the ruling party

Antidiscrimination Agency, 11 December 2017), 288, [http://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/Expertise\\_Diskriminierungserfahrungen\\_in\\_Deutschland.pdf](http://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/Expertise_Diskriminierungserfahrungen_in_Deutschland.pdf) (accessed 13 February 2019).

<sup>79</sup> Beigang et al., “Discrimination Experiences in Germany” (see note 78), 115.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

and state institutions nearly disappeared during the two decades of governance under a single-party rule that has increasingly become authoritarian. In the eyes of some constituents, this seems to create a fear of losing their access to the improved service provision and benefits if the AKP loses power.<sup>81</sup>

Especially those in Europe who cast a “YES” vote in the referendum are usually like us who came from rural Anatolia and whose relatives had no place in the [old political and economic] system. For instance, the idea of having a university degree was unthinkable because there was no opportunity to do so. It is different now. There are growing opportunities in the last 10–15 years. There are many who continue their education, who work. Welfare of the society has increased. This is why they cast a “YES” vote.

The fear of losing privileges is, however, not just limited to anxiety over losing access to social services and policies. Especially among the politically pious constituents, the fear of a potential takeover by the CHP if the AKP loses power seems to have motivated support for the AKP. This is especially the case among constituencies close to Milli Görüş, despite the increasing discomfort and vocal criticism about AKP policies. At the core of this fear lies the strong association of the CHP with strictly secularist policies to restrain religion from the realms of law, education, and family, and to disempower non-state religious actors and teachings. Following the transition to electoral democracy in 1946, the increasing amount of contact with religious networks and orders has, perhaps unintentionally, led to an increase in the degree of infiltration by these networks and orders into associational life since the 1960s. Starting in the 1970s, religious networks and movements also entered the realm of party politics as the struggle over controlling political organizations and the mobilization of Islam became fiercer.

Conservative Islamist parties associated with the Nakşibendis – particularly the İskenderpaşa Cemaati, led by Sheikh Mehmet Zahit Kotku – were founded in the 1970s, concurrent with the rise of Islamist

politics across the world.<sup>82</sup> The AKP is the direct successor and byproduct of these parties, which were repeatedly closed down throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s by the army or the Constitutional Court.<sup>83</sup> Political connections to religious movements and networks were, however, not limited to the Islamist parties. Turgut Özal, the leader of the Justice Party and the prime minister of the government established after the military coup in 1980, is also known, for instance, to have connections with the Nakşibendi order.<sup>84</sup>

Against this backdrop, the political crisis between Turkey and the Netherlands in the months leading to the 2017 referendum and the tension with Germany were perceived as potential threats to the leadership position of the AKP, and thus to the political gains that Islamists had achieved during and under AKP rule.<sup>85</sup> As such, they were also important watershed events in shifting the electoral decisions in favor of the suggested constitutional changes. As the CHP has not yet managed to detach itself from the image of an acute secularist party, the belief that the “CHP will take over if the AKP loses” motivated the shift in electoral decisions. Nevertheless, it is also noteworthy to mention that there was a strategic rapprochement within the Milli Görüş movement – especially among the base of the Felicity Party – with the CHP in the eve of the 2018 elections. Given the high likelihood that the AKP will continue its authoritarian stand, thereby drawing criticism from within the Islamist movement, a similar rapprochement might continue.

<sup>82</sup> Eric J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017 [1993]), 260.

<sup>83</sup> Ateş Altınordu, “The Rise and Transformation of German Political Catholicism (1848–1914) and Turkish Political Islam (1970–2011)”, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 65, no. 1 (2013): 383–408.

<sup>84</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History* (see note 82), 288.

<sup>85</sup> One needs to be cautious, however, not to make over-generalizations about the political gains of Islamists during the 16 years of AKP rule. Since the 2018 elections, many Islamist brotherhoods (*cemaat*) and religious orders (*tariqats*) have found themselves under close scrutiny by the government and President Erdoğan. See “Who Is Next in Line?” (in Turkish), *Rusen Cakir*, 26 July 2018, <http://rusencakir.com/Sirada-hangi-cemaatler-var/6792> (accessed 13 February 2019).

<sup>81</sup> Also see Murat Somer, “Understanding Turkey’s Democratic Breakdown: Old vs. New and Indigenous vs. Global Authoritarianism”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 481–503.

# Going beyond “Loyalty” and “Democratic Culture”

The level of mass support given in Germany by the electorate to the AKP and President Erdoğan should be rethought outside of the frameworks of “loyalty” and “democratic culture.” Social policy, political discourse, media representations, economic benefits, and geopolitics combined, but also separately, affect voter preferences. As such, voting is neither a purely rational nor irrational behavior. It involves material and emotional calculations, especially at times when politics is increasingly being driven by emotions.<sup>86</sup>

Economic growth and improved service provision within and outside of Turkey – together with the charismatic personality of Erdoğan and his daring political rhetoric – seem to have motivated voting preferences in favor of the party. Nonetheless, if it were not for the mediating effects of the multilayered and multi-foci struggles for political representation and equal recognition, social policy and political discourse alone would not have propelled the constituents toward the AKP. What was rather at stake is that the AKP government’s concerted policies targeting migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children and the discourse of a strong state resonated with existing demands for more representation within Turkish society and a better organized associational realm in Germany that would improve the migrants’ social standing in Germany.

The degree to which these material and emotional motivations prevail among different groups – and how these motivations interact with other factors – remains unanswered in this study. Even though the sample of interviewees that this paper builds its findings on is diverse, a larger and better representative sample is necessary to depict – at a higher confidence level – the relative importance of these material and emotional mechanisms with regard to the support given by different groups. Future research

might benefit significantly from such a survey by depicting a representative picture of the relationship between voting preferences and justifications, on the one hand, and that between preferences and factors, such as the time of arrival, historical patterns of voting, legal status, generational differences, as well as degrees and forms of religiosity, on the other hand.

**It is yet important not to conflate the motivations of the constituents with those of the political actors.**

Despite these shortcomings, however, the findings underline the importance of not conflating the motivations of the constituents with those of the political actors. For the Turkish state, the diaspora population carries a strategic importance for foreign- and domestic-policy ends. The emphasis of both AKP officials and pro-government civil society actors on the cultural heritage of migrants from Turkey should be interpreted along these two axes. In the context of increasing social and political anxieties in Germany over Muslim immigration and integration, the Turkish state has conveniently positioned itself as the defender, and even the patron, of its “Muslim” citizens abroad and their offspring. In the domestic sphere, such positioning has arguably contributed to the image of a “strong and unified state and nation,” which has, in turn, aided President Erdoğan in further consolidating his power.

The focus on the preservation of cultural heritage, that is, Turkish language and Sunni identity, is not unique to the AKP government; it goes as far back as the policies designed in the aftermath of the 1980 coup. What distinguishes the current moment, and especially the emphasis on religion, is the AKP government’s efforts in making “combating Islamophobia” – more saliently in the last couple of years – the discursive backbone of its claim to become the patron of not only the migrants from Turkey and

<sup>86</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, “False Flags: The Myth of the Nationalist Resurgence”, *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March/April 2019).

their children but also the Muslim masses worldwide.<sup>87</sup> It is noteworthy that the first time that “Islamophobia” appeared in the Turkish Parliament’s Human Rights Sub-Commission reports<sup>88</sup> was in the late 2000s. Concerned by the Migration Law enacted in Germany in 2005, the sub-commission’s activity report covering the period between October 2009 and October 2010 noted that “Islamophobic, xenophobic and racist tendencies influenced political decision-makers. Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and France have through legal changes made family unification more difficult.”

Following the deadly attacks in Norway in June 2011 by the right-wing extremist Anders Breivik, who held strong anti-Muslim views, the sub-commission decided to monitor “Islamophobia in Europe and the US together with the xenophobic and racist attitudes, implementations and the related legal changes.”<sup>89</sup> These earlier attempts at reporting “Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism” culminated in January 2016 with the launch of a new group within the sub-commission to systematically investigate “Islamophobia in the West.”<sup>90</sup> These efforts were accompanied by the annual European Islamophobia Report,<sup>91</sup> launched by SETA in 2015, with contributions from internationally renowned Islamophobia scholars. The annual report is announced to the public each year during an inter-

national event in which AKP politicians regularly participate.

Moreover, Muslims — Turkish and non-Turkish alike — can also get in touch with the call centers at the consulates to report verbal and physical attacks, harassment, as well as any discriminatory practices that they experience in everyday life. Zafer Sırakaya, one of the vice-heads of the AKP’s Foreign Relations unit, who himself was born in Germany to Turkish parents, noted the following in his new year’s greetings at the end of 2018:

European states fall short in addressing the unjust treatment that European Turks face in exercising their human and personal rights. The situation is even more dire given the worldwide exclusion of individuals who adhere to the Muslim faith. [...] We have undertaken in 2018, as we did in previous years, significant steps to combat against an anti-Islam mindset and populist anxieties feeding xenophobia and discrimination. We will continue our endeavors in this regard.

Even though Turkish diaspora policies primarily target migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children — especially in Europe, in general, and in Germany, in particular — the discourse of “combating Islamophobia” aims to gain broader appeal. Bülent Bilgi, the president of the UID, for instance, explained in an interview aired on Kanal Avrupa in December 2018 the change in the organization’s name in 2018 (previously called the Union of European Turkish Democrats): “There are not a lot of people with Turkish origin outside of Europe. In order to include these people who are not Turkish but regardless have a place in our emotional geography, we took out the word ‘Turkish.’ One such example is Bosnia. They are not Turkish but are sympathetic to Turkey.” As such, the AKP government’s strong emphasis on “combating Islamophobia” arguably aims at creating a Muslim diaspora while at the same endeavoring to position Turkey as the leader of the *umma*.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Sinem Adar and Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, “A Muslim Counter-Hegemony? Turkey’s Soft Power Strategies and Islamophobia”, *Jadaliyya*, 6 May 2019, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/38646/A-Muslim-Counter-Hegemony-Turkey's-Soft-Power-Strategies-and-Islamophobia> (accessed May 27, 2019).

<sup>88</sup> These reports have been published since the early 1990s in order to address human rights issues concerning Turkish citizens in and outside of Turkey. Significant parts of the reports have since been dedicated to the problems and concerns of Turkish migrants. The reports can be accessed at <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/index.htm> (accessed on 22 January 2019).

<sup>89</sup> The report covering the period between June 2011 and October 2012, see [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/belge/24\\_Donem\\_1\\_ve\\_2\\_Yasama\\_Yillari\\_Faaliyet\\_Raporu.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/belge/24_Donem_1_ve_2_Yasama_Yillari_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf) (accessed on 22 January 2019).

<sup>90</sup> The report covering the period between November 2015 and December 2017, see [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/docs/2018/29\\_yy\\_faaliyetraporu1\\_07022018.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/docs/2018/29_yy_faaliyetraporu1_07022018.pdf) (accessed on 22 January 2019).

<sup>91</sup> The reports can be accessed at <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/events/seta-european-islamophobia-report-2016/> (accessed 23 April 2019).

<sup>92</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-anti-muslim-hatred\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-anti-muslim-hatred_en) (accessed 13 February 2019).

# Conclusions and Recommendations

For the first time in the 2014 presidential elections, Turkish voters cast their votes at the ballot boxes stationed in their countries of residence. New regulations introduced in 2008 into the election law — and the subsequent measures taken in 2012 — that enabled voting in the countries of residence were part of Turkey’s changing approach toward migrants from Turkey and their foreign-born children that began in 2010. In the last decade, concurrent with a global increase in diaspora policies, Turkish diaspora policies have entered a new phase. An overt interest in youth mobilization; the launching of new state agencies; cooperation between state and civil society actors in the realms of education, culture, and religion; and finally, a broader conceptualization of the diaspora defined by religious unity have so far marked this new phase.

The systematization and institutionalization of diaspora policies under AKP rule — and increasing levels of cooperation with civil society actors — reflect a broader trend in the AKP government’s changing outlook toward foreign policy, defined through the concept of “public diplomacy.” Moreover, they run concurrently with changes in the domestic policy outlook, which has increasingly accentuated religion as an important source of legitimacy in politics. The AKP government’s rather ambitious political program of an independent and assertive foreign policy, on the one hand, and a socially conservative domestic policy, on the other, underlines an attempt to remake the national community within and outside of Turkey’s borders. This comes at a time when populist discourses, xenophobic nationalism, and anxieties around religious and cultural differences have gained currency in countries across the world, including Germany.

The interest of the Turkish government in the migrant population is likely to continue in the future with a strong identitarian focus. This is not only because of the ruling AKP’s ongoing ambitions — both

in foreign and domestic policy — despite the limits posed by acceleratingly deteriorating relations with its Western partners as well as those due to the conflict in Syria. Moreover, Turkey’s deepening economic crisis is further straining the AKP government, thereby accentuating the need for economic remittances. There have already been policy changes introduced to this end in order to facilitate the flow of economic remittances to Turkey. For instance, new legislation in 2017 has exempted citizens abroad and those with a Blue Card from value-added tax on their first purchases of residential and commercial real estate, as long as the transaction is made with foreign currency.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, since 2003, if Turkish citizens abroad want to invest in Turkey, they are legally considered “foreign investors,” and thus, subject to the Foreign Direct Investment Law.<sup>94</sup>

Notwithstanding the likelihood that the AKP government and President Erdoğan will remain interested in accessing and mobilizing migrants and their foreign-born children, complete influence over them should not be taken for granted. The picture is more complicated. To start with, more than half of the eligible voters chose not to vote in the 2018 elections. Among those who voted, voting patterns remain diverse. Socio-economic mobility and status anxiety — either due to the feelings of misrecognition in Germany or due to the fear of a secularist takeover in Turkey — seem to drive the voting preferences of the

93 “Citizens Living Abroad No Longer Have to Pay Value-added Tax While Buying Commercial and Residential Real Estate in Turkey” (Turkish), *HaberTürk*, 23 February 2017, <https://www.haberturk.com/ekonomi/is-yasam/haber/1401213-yurt-disinda-yasayan-turkler-turkiyede-aldiklari-ilk-konut-ve-isyeri-icin-kdv-odemeyecek> (accessed 10 November 2018).

94 See the Foreign Direct Investment Law at <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.4875.pdf> (accessed 1 December 2018).

AKP constituency. Even though a large-scale representative survey is necessary to reach generalizable conclusions, one could infer on the basis of this study that justifications for voting in favor of the AKP are likely to vary across generations.

Policy-makers should also not overlook a seemingly growing discomfort within the population about the involvement of the Turkish government in their lives. The most recent example of such tension is the resignation of the head and the entire board of DITIB in Lower Saxony, following allegations of interference by DITIB headquarters in Cologne and the Turkish religious attaché.<sup>95</sup> Similar discomfort and criticism of “too much interference” was also voiced even by some of the constituencies, who otherwise are sympathetic to AKP policies and the rhetoric of President Erdoğan. All this suggests that the political attitudes of migrants from Turkey and their Germany-born children should not be reduced to explanations such as “loyalty to Turkey” and “lack of democratic culture.” The dynamics are much more complex and require equally complex answers.

The most essential starting point should be to differentiate between the Turkish government’s systematic efforts to instrumentalize migrants and their foreign-born children toward its domestic- and foreign-policy ends, and the migrants’ demands, which can be summarized in two points: the right to political representation and the right to equal recognition. Even though the rise of populist actors and anti-immigrant sentiments in Germany and elsewhere makes addressing these demands challenging, there is ample room to design and implement appropriate policies. Against this backdrop, granting migrants from Turkey and their Germany-born children the right to vote in local elections is a necessary and vital starting point. An extension of the right to political representation would not only address a long-standing demand within the population. It would also help cultivate a sense of belonging and acceptance in Germany.

Furthermore, the question of political representation should not be confined solely to voting rights.

Migrant associations are influential actors in making claims on behalf of migrants. Given the increasing influence of the Turkish state in the associational landscape, institutional autonomy should be highly encouraged. This is not an easy task, given that it requires a careful balancing act to not isolate the community from social and cultural networks. A good example of such a balancing act is a recent decision taken by the state of Hessen to suspend cooperation with DITIB in the provision of religious education until the latter provides sufficient evidence of institutional autonomy from *Diyanet* in Turkey and the DITIB headquarters in Cologne. As part of the decision, schools that have already offered, in cooperation with DITIB Hessen, Islamic religious instruction will introduce a new religious education program in the coming school year as part of a school trial at grade 7.<sup>96</sup> This new program is intended especially for pupils of Muslim faith and is set up under the sole responsibility of the state of Hessen. This model can set an example to other states as well as encourage institutional autonomy.

Last, but not least, political actors should also be wary of exclusionary discourses against Islam and against practicing Muslims. In a highly secularized society such as Germany, social programs that would bring practicing Muslims in dialogue with non-practicing members of the society can help build societal trust. Toward this end, cooperation with non-partisan migrant associations should be encouraged.

<sup>95</sup> “In Protest: The Head of DITIB in Lower Saxony Resigns” (in German), *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 November 2018, <http://www.haz.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Niedersachsen/Ditib-Landesvorsitzender-Niedersachsen-wehrt-sich-gegen-Einflussnahme-Ankaras-und-tritt-ab> (accessed 5 December 2018). Also see Rohe, *Report on the Religious Instruction* (see note 30), 36.

<sup>96</sup> Hessen Ministry of Culture, “Hesse Suspends Expansion of Islamic Religious Education Taught in Cooperation with DITIB” (in German), Press Release, 20 February 2019, <https://kultusministerium.hessen.de/presse/pressemitteilung/hessen-setzt-ausweitung-des-kooperation-mit-ditib-erteilten-islamischen-religionsunterrichts-aus-0> (accessed 23 April 2019).

## Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party
CHP	Republican People's Party/Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi
DITIB	Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs / Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party/Halkların Demokratik Partisi
IGMG	Islamic Community Milli Görüş/Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş
MHP	Nationalist Action Party/Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi
MP	Member of Parliament
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê
SETA	Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research/Siyaset Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı
UID	Union of International Democrats
VIKZ	Federation of Islamic Cultural Centers/Verband Islamischer Kulturzentren
YTB	Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities/Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı





