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THE EFFECT OF YOUTH'S NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS ON THEIR FUTURE CONCERNS

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Abstract

Migration has become an increasingly significant phenomenon with social, economic, and cultural dimensions, shaping interpersonal interactions in diverse ways. This study situates itself within the fields of migration sociology and social psychology, with a particular focus on Integrated Threat Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Competition Theory as theoretical foundations. These frameworks help explain how perceptions of immigrants can generate fear, hopelessness, and social tension among youth. This study aims to examine the impact of young people's attitudes toward immigrants on their future concerns, focusing on university students in Türkiye, particularly in the TRA1 region (Erzurum, Erzincan, Bayburt). Field research indicates that negative attitudes toward immigrants significantly predict fear and hopelessness about the future. Moderator analysis further reveals that gender, age, employment status, city of residence, and education level influence the strength of this relationship. Specifically, these effects are more pronounced among women, non-working students, younger individuals, and students in smaller cities. By combining sociological and psychological perspectives, this research deepens our understanding of the psychosocial dynamics of immigration in non-border regions. The findings contribute to the migration literature by showing that even in areas with limited immigrant populations, negative attitudes strongly shape youth's future perceptions.

Keywords: *Migration, Negative Attitude Toward Immigrants, Future Anxiety, Public Policy, Türkiye.*

Jel Code: *F22, H83, O15*

Gençlerin Göçmenlere Yönelik Olumsuz Tutumların Gelecek Kaygıları Üzerindeki Etkisi

Öz

Göç, sosyal, ekonomik ve kültürel boyutlarıyla giderek daha önemli bir olgu haline gelmiş ve kişilerarası etkileşimleri çeşitli şekillerde şekillendirmiştir. Bu çalışma, özellikle Bütünleşik Tehdit Teorisi, Sosyal Kimlik Teorisi ve Rekabet Teorisi'ne teorik temeller olarak odaklanarak, göç sosyolojisi ve sosyal psikoloji alanları içerisinde yer almaktadır. Bu çerçeveler, göçmen algılarının gençler arasında korku, umutsuzluk ve toplumsal gerginliğe nasıl yol açabileceğini açıklamaya yardımcı olmaktadır. Bu çalışma, özellikle TRA1 bölgesindeki (Erzurum, Erzincan, Bayburt) Türkiye'deki üniversite öğrencilerine odaklanarak, gençlerin göçmenlere yönelik tutumlarının gelecek kaygıları üzerindeki etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Saha araştırmaları, göçmenlere yönelik olumsuz tutumların gelecekle ilgili korku ve umutsuzluğu anlamlı şekilde yordadığını göstermektedir. Moderatör analizi ayrıca cinsiyet, yaş, istihdam durumu, ikamet edilen şehir ve eğitim düzeyinin bu ilişkinin gücünü etkilediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle bu etkiler kadınlar, çalışmayan öğrenciler, daha genç bireyler ve küçük şehirlerdeki öğrenciler arasında daha belirgindir. Bu araştırma, sosyolojik ve psikolojik bakış açılarını bir araya getirerek, sınır dışı bölgelerdeki göçün psikososyal dinamiklerine dair anlayışımızı derinleştirmektedir. Bulgular, göçmen nüfusunun sınırlı olduğu bölgelerde bile olumsuz tutumların gençlerin gelecek algılarını güçlü bir şekilde şekillendirdiğini göstererek göç literatürüne katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Göç, Göçmenlere yönelik olumsuz tutum, Gelecek kaygısı, Kamu Politikası, Türkiye.*

Jel Kodu: *F22, H83, O15*

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1. Introduction

Migration is a complex phenomenon characterized by the movement of individuals from one location to another, typically with the intention of settling in a new place (Dingle & Drake, 2007). This movement can occur across international borders (international migration) or within a single country (internal migration) (Skeldon, 2006). Migration is driven by a variety of factors and can be categorized as either voluntary or involuntary, depending on whether individuals choose to migrate or are compelled to do so by external circumstances (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022).

Migration can have significant negative impacts on destination countries in various ways, including economic, social, and cultural dimensions. First, a sudden influx of immigrants can strain public services such as healthcare, education, and housing. This pressure can lead to overcrowding and a decline in the quality of services available to both immigrants and local residents (Karasu, 2021). Second, cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts within communities. Language barriers and differing cultural practices may create divisions or foster discrimination against immigrant populations (Director of National Intelligence [DNI], 2021). Third, increasing competition for jobs can result in tensions between local workers and immigrants, particularly in low-skilled labor markets. Some local workers may perceive those immigrants are taking their jobs or driving down wages (Kül, 2016).

In this context, within the migration literature, scholars have developed a number of theoretical frameworks to understand migration dynamics and their consequences. Three theories are particularly relevant to this study. First, Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) explains how realistic threats, symbolic threats, stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety contribute to prejudice and negative attitudes toward immigrants. Second, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) highlights how group membership and identity processes lead individuals to favor in-groups and devalue out-groups. Third, Competition Theory (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996) argues that competition for scarce economic and social resources fosters hostility toward immigrant populations.

Migration theories encompass a wide array of variables, including the reasons for migration, the geographical distance between regions of origin and destination, the duration of stay in the destination, the political and socioeconomic conditions of the destination, the ethnic and cultural structure of the receiving society, and the individual characteristics of migrants (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022; Özcan, 2017). Several theories have been formulated to address the causes and effects of migration. Although these theories are insufficient to fully explain migration processes, particularly those driven by diverse factors, and are not universally accepted, they make important contributions to understanding and interpreting migration dynamics (Karataş, 2022, p. 763).

While many migration theories primarily explain the structural causes of mobility through push and pull factors, some approaches focus on societal attitudes toward immigrants. However, some theories also address the attitudes of citizens towards immigrants, which are often shaped by xenophobia. These theories aim to identify and explain negative attitudes towards immigrants. This study intends to apply such theories to explore the negative attitudes that young people may hold towards immigrants. One of these theories is the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), which is frequently referenced in studies examining the relationship between perceived intergroup threats and prejudices or negative attitudes in the social psychology literature. The Integrated Threat Theory explores the threat perceptions that underpin negative attitudes and prejudices towards immigrants. According to this theory, four main types of threats affect the attitudes individuals develop towards immigrants. First, realistic threats refer to perceived threats to the economic or political power of a certain group or to the physical and material well-being of in-group members. These threats are associated with areas such as health, security, the economy, and politics, and they are grounded in Realistic Conflict Theory, which posits that limited resources can create conflict and competition

between groups (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). This conflict and competition can give rise to negative attitudes such as prejudice and discrimination (Riek et al., 2006; Stephan, et al., 1998). Secondly, symbolic threats emerge from perceived threats to a group's worldview, lifestyle, values, beliefs, and cultural norms. Such threats are crucial for the preservation of in-group identity (Stephan et al., 2000). Third, negative stereotypes about immigrants, such as those of "laziness," "aggressiveness," or "criminal tendencies," foster negative expectations towards out-group members. These stereotypes are significant determinants of prejudice (Riek et al., 2006). Fourth, the concept of intergroup anxiety refers to the perceived threat individuals experience during interactions with out-group members. This situation is marked by feelings of uncertainty and concerns about rejection, exclusion, or humiliation. Considered a threat at the individual level, intergroup anxiety reflects the fear that intergroup interactions may yield negative consequences (Croucher, 2013). Within the framework of Integrated Threat Theory, realistic threats, symbolic threats, and negative stereotypes operate at the group level, while intergroup anxiety is a threat experienced at the individual level.

A significant contribution to understanding intergroup dynamics is offered by the social identity approach. Social identity theory, developed by Tajfel (1981), explains how individuals perceive themselves and others in terms of group membership. According to this theory, individuals categorize themselves into various groups (e.g., ethnicity, gender) and define these groups as ingroups and outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). The tendency to view one's own group as superior to other groups leads individuals to develop prejudiced attitudes towards out-group members, which in turn contributes to enhanced self-esteem. Individuals with a strong social identity are expected to have lower levels of social integration (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In this context, social identity theory explores how individuals' sense of identity, derived from their group affiliations, is shaped and how these processes influence interpersonal relationships. According to the theory, individuals define themselves based on their group membership and undergo identification processes that form their social identities, thus shaping in-group dynamics.

From a more structural and economically driven perspective, competition theory argues that the struggle over scarce resources generates hostile attitudes toward immigrants. In particular, individuals who are struggling with unemployment or who are concentrated in low-status jobs, as well as those living in low-income or racially diverse neighborhoods, are more likely to feel economically threatened (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996, p. 953). This sense of economic insecurity causes local populations to perceive immigrants as a potential threat, thereby fostering prejudiced attitudes. Economic uncertainties and resource shortages increase competition within local communities, reinforcing negative views towards immigrants. In this context, the influence of economic conditions and social dynamics on attitudes towards immigrants becomes increasingly significant (Kusow & DeLisi, 2021). Together, these theories provide a robust conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between negative attitudes toward immigrants and psychosocial outcomes such as future fear and hopelessness.

2. Migration and Immigration Perception Literature

Türkiye plays a crucial role in international migration, functioning as both a major host country for refugees and an important transit point for migrants aiming to reach Europe (İçduygu & Aksel, 2012). Due to its geographical location, Türkiye experiences significant migration flows. Positioned at the intersection of the European and Asian continents, it serves as a transit route for large waves of migration to Europe, particularly from the region defined as the Middle East. Given its location at the crossroads of migration routes, the phenomenon of migration in Türkiye is deeply integrated into social life.

Historically, Türkiye was primarily a country that sent migrants, particularly in the 1960s, in response to Europe's increasing labor force demands. While it has continued to send migrants in recent years, Türkiye has also become a destination for migrants due to crises in neighboring countries. A

particularly significant influx occurred in and after 2011, when a large number of irregular migrants entered the country due to the civil war in Syria (Yazgan et al., 2015). Türkiye hosts the second largest refugee population after Islamic Republic of Iran in the world. As of August 2025, about 2.9 million Syrians are registered under temporary protection or refugee status in Türkiye. According to UNHCR data, this makes Türkiye the top second refugee-hosting country globally (UNHCR, 2025). While Türkiye also contends with irregular migration and undocumented persons, there is currently no verifiable estimate publicly accepted that the number of undocumented migrants exceeds ten million (Anadolu Ajansı [A.A.], 2023). This reflects Türkiye's strategic geographical position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia (Kaya, 2023; Senyücel-Gündoğar & Dark, 2019), making it a critical refuge for those fleeing instability in neighboring regions (Blank et al., 2002).

Since the 2015-16 European migration crisis, Türkiye has become a key player in managing migration flows to Europe. The EU-Türkiye agreement of March 2016 formalized an arrangement in which Türkiye would help curb the migration flow to Europe in exchange for financial aid and political concessions from the EU (Dagi, 2020). This agreement underscores Türkiye's role as a buffer state that significantly influences EU migration policies (Balta & Özel, 2021).

Studies on the attitudes of young people towards immigrants in Türkiye generally indicate a negative perception. Research has shown that university students often hold negative attitudes towards immigrants. For example, a study by Şengül (2022) found that 72.57% of participants exhibited a negative attitude towards immigrants. Similarly, a study by Çetin and Demirel (2023) revealed that as participants' discomfort with immigrants increased, so did their negative attitudes. These studies also explore the effects of various demographic variables and sociocultural factors. The attitudes of young people towards immigrants can vary depending on several factors. A study on young people's attitudes towards Syrian immigrants in Türkiye indicated that negative attitudes were influenced by gender, education level, and religious beliefs (Şengül, 2022).

Young people's attitudes towards immigrants are shaped by a range of factors and individual differences (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). Generally, their attitudes depend on socioeconomic status, education level, religious beliefs, and political views (Phinney et al., 2022). Studies show that young people tend to be more open-minded and tolerant towards immigrants. However, issues such as economic concerns and perceived threats to the job market can lead to negative attitudes (Janmaat & Keating, 2019).

Socioeconomic status is another key factor influencing young people's attitudes towards immigrants. Research suggests that individuals with higher socioeconomic status tend to develop more positive attitudes towards immigrants (Hoxhaj & Zuccotti, 2021). This indicates that economic concerns and social security play significant roles in shaping perceptions of immigrants. It is also noteworthy that women generally hold fewer negative attitudes towards immigrants than men (François & Magni-Berton, 2013).

The relationship between future concerns and attitudes toward immigrants significantly impacts the social and psychological states of young individuals. Studies show that young people's attitudes towards immigrants are linked to concerns about their future. For example, a study conducted among university students found that those with heightened concerns about the future exhibited more negative attitudes towards immigrants. This suggests that uncertainties about the future can affect young people's perceptions of social groups (Aktürk et al., 2024). Given this concentration of immigrants in border and metropolitan areas, it is important to examine attitudes in less-affected regions such as TRA1 to determine whether negative perceptions are driven primarily by direct contact or by broader national discourse.

The density of the immigrant population in large cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir plays an important role in shaping young people's attitudes towards immigrants. Since young people in these cities have more opportunities to interact with immigrants, changes in their attitudes are more pronounced. For instance, young people living in Istanbul have been found to hold more positive attitudes towards immigrants (Demir, 2018). In border provinces, such as Hatay, Gaziantep, and Kilis, where Syrian immigrants are concentrated, local attitudes towards immigrants have evolved over time. Initially more negative, these attitudes have become more positive due to social integration efforts and shared life experiences (İpekyolu Kalkınma Ajansı [İKA], 2019). Conversely, in rural and underdeveloped regions, attitudes towards immigrants tend to remain more negative. Young people in these areas, with limited interaction with immigrants, often exhibit prejudiced attitudes (Karataş & Ayyıldız, 2021).

As noted by Brettell and Hollifield (2022), research on youth attitudes toward immigrants has increasingly focused on psychosocial outcomes. Changes in young people's attitudes towards immigrants exhibit significant regional differences. Positive changes are evident in large cities and border regions, while negative attitudes persist in rural areas. Therefore, within the scope of this study, although the provinces in question are not directly targeted by immigration, their position along the transit route for Afghan migration from Iran plays a critical role. Despite not being border regions or metropolitan cities, these areas are affected by national-level reservations about immigration. At this juncture, the perceptions of young people regarding employment and security are of significant importance. Building on this literature and guided by Integrated Threat Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Competition Theory, this study tests the following hypotheses.

H1: Young people's attitudes towards immigrants have a positive and significant effect on their fears about the future.

H2: Young people's attitudes towards immigrants have a positive and significant effect on their hopelessness about the future.

3. Method

Migration has significant social and economic implications in many countries today. Türkiye, in particular, hosts a large immigrant population, primarily due to the influx of Syrian refugees. The attitudes that young people develop towards this situation are crucial for fostering social harmony and peace. This research aims to not only understand the attitudes of young people towards immigrants but also to contribute to the development of social policies by revealing how these attitudes are influenced by concerns about the future.

The primary objective of the research is to examine the attitudes of young people towards immigrants and to analyze how these attitudes are shaped by their concerns about the future. The following research questions guide this study:

RQ-1: What are the attitudes of young people towards immigrants?

RQ2: What is the relationship between concerns about the future and attitudes towards immigrants?

RQ3: Which sociodemographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education level) influence these attitudes?

This study is designed as a field research project. It is a prospective, cross-sectional, and descriptive study, focusing on gathering data from individuals within a specific social unit over a defined period. A survey is used to collect information, which includes two distinct scales along with

demographic characteristics. Detailed information about these scales is provided below. The collected data is analyzed using SPSS, applying various statistical methods. In addition to descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyses are conducted to explore the relationships between attitudes towards immigrants and concerns about the future.

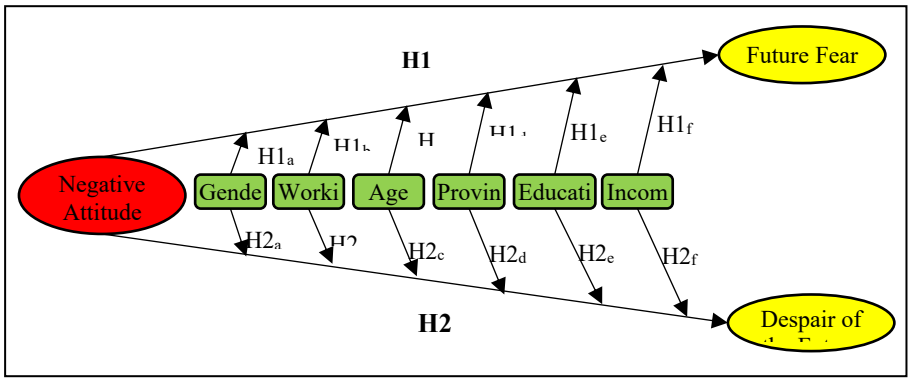
Based on the research questions outlined above, two primary hypotheses and six related sub-hypotheses are tested in this study. Regression analyses are used to test the two main hypotheses, while the moderating (regulatory) effects of demographic factors are examined through the sub-hypotheses. The research model, which visualizes these hypotheses, is presented in Figure 1.

H1: Young people's attitudes towards immigrants have a positive and significant effect on their fears about the future.

H2: Young people's attitudes towards immigrants have a positive and significant effect on their hopelessness about the future.

Figure 1

Research Model



3.1. Regional Context and Research Rationale

This research will be conducted among university students in the TRA1 region. According to the statistics provided by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), there are approximately 100,000 registered students across four universities in this region: Atatürk University, Erzurum Technical University, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, and Bayburt University. Based on this population, a sample size of 384 students was determined, calculated at a 95% confidence level. The participants' age range is between 15 and 32 years, and they will be selected through random sampling. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling from student registries of four universities in the TRA1 region. Participation was voluntary and open to students across all departments.

The TRA1 region, comprising Erzurum, Erzincan, and Bayburt, is characterized by a largely young population and relatively low levels of direct immigrant settlement. According to TÜİK (2024) data, the region has approximately 1.3 million inhabitants, with over 100,000 university students across four major universities. While the region is not a primary destination for immigrant populations, its location along internal transit routes means that local perceptions of immigration are shaped by national discourse rather than daily interaction with immigrants.

This study focuses on TRA1 precisely because it allows an examination of how indirect exposure to immigration—through media and public debate—shapes youth attitudes and psychosocial outcomes. The region's relatively homogeneous population and limited immigrant presence serve as both an opportunity (isolating national discourse effects) and a limitation (restricting generalizability to high-immigration contexts).

Of the final sample (N=510), fewer than 5% self-identified as first- or second-generation immigrants. This low proportion limits within-group comparison but allows for capturing the dominant local youth perspective. Because the region has relatively few immigrant students, findings may not fully capture attitudes in metropolitan or border regions where daily interaction with immigrants is higher.

3.2. Data Collection Tools

A survey, consisting of two distinct scales and demographic questions, was employed for this study. The first section of the survey gathers demographic data, including gender, employment status, age, income, education level, and city of residence. The second part of the survey includes the Immigrant Attitudes Scale, developed by Varela et al. (2013) and adapted into Turkish by Günay et al. (2019). This scale comprises 12 statements, with some reverse-coded items. The third section of the questionnaire includes the Future Anxiety (Fear and Hopelessness) Scale, developed by Geylani and Yıldız (2022), designed to assess the future anxieties of young people. Both scales use a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. These scales have been tested for validity and reliability in previous studies; however, in the context of this study, further statistical analyses were performed to ensure the robustness of the data and findings.

The reliability analysis conducted within this study indicated high reliability for both scales. Specifically, the reliability coefficient for the Immigrant Attitudes Scale (consisting of 12 statements) was found to be .933. For the Future Anxiety Scale (comprising 19 statements), the reliability coefficient was .943. Additionally, the reliability of the sub-dimensions of the Future Anxiety Scale was assessed. The reliability for the "Fear of the Future" sub-dimension (13 items) was found to be .936, while the "Hopelessness about the Future" sub-dimension (6 items) exhibited a reliability of .883.

Factor analysis was also performed to assess the validity and reliability of the scales. The results revealed no statistical issues. For the Immigrant Attitudes Scale, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was .960, with a p-value of .000, indicating that the scale explains 57.54% of the total variance. The factor loadings for each item of the scale were greater than .70. Similarly, for the Future Anxiety Scale, the KMO value was .967, with a p-value of .000, explaining 58.64% of the total variance. The factor loadings for each item were above .60, and the sub-dimensions were clearly distinguished. Furthermore, the skewness and kurtosis values of both scales were within the acceptable range of ±1.50, indicating that the data follow a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The results of the analyses regarding the validity and reliability of the scales are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Validity and Reliability Analysis of Scales

	n	x̄	Std. Dev.	Skew.	Kurt.	α	KMO	Sig. (*p*)	Tot. Var. Exp.
Negative Attitude Toward Immigrants	510	3.06	.977	-.017	-.839	.933	.960	.000	%57.54
Future Anxiety	510	2.86	.039	-.241	-1.260	.943	.967	.000	%58.64
- Future Fear	510	2.73	.955	-.149	-1.041	.936	-	-	-
- Despair of the Future	510	2.99	1.017	-.033	-.910	.883	-	-	-

3.3. Ethical Approval and Implementation

For this study, the necessary ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Atatürk University, as indicated in the official approval letter dated 25.11.2024 (numbered 20 sessions, decision number 305 and document number E.88656144-000-2400387409). The

purpose, content, and confidentiality principles of the study were thoroughly explained to the participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The data collection process was primarily conducted through an online survey (Google Forms). However, a paper-based survey was administered to 20% of the participants to ensure a diverse range of responses. As a result, a mixed-methods approach was employed, allowing for a broader reach and enhancing the overall data collection process.

4. Findings

In this study, descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the demographic characteristics of the participants prior to testing the hypotheses outlined in the model presented above. Although the optimal sample size for the study was 384 participants, based on a 95% confidence level, analyses were conducted with data from 543 individuals, exceeding the required sample size. Thirty-three participants were excluded from the study due to incomplete or random responses to the survey. As a result, the final sample consisted of 510 participants, all of whom were studying in the TRA1 region of Türkiye. Of these, 49.8% were female (n=254) and 50.2% were male (n=256).

Participants were also asked whether they were employed outside of their education. The results showed that 66.5% of the participants (n=339) were not employed outside of their studies, while 33.5% (n=171) were employed in some capacity. Regarding the age distribution of the participants, it was found that 56.3% (n=287) were between the ages of 18 and 22, 26.9% (n=137) were between the ages of 23 and 27, and 16.9% (n=86) were 28 years of age or older.

In terms of geographic distribution, the participants were drawn from three provinces within the TRA1 region. Specifically, 40.2% (n=205) of the participants were from Erzurum, 31.6% (n=161) from Erzincan, and 28.2% (n=144) from Bayburt. Regarding educational attainment, 22% (n=112) of the participants held an associate degree, 52.4% (n=267) held a bachelor's degree, 18% (n=92) held a master's degree, and 7.6% (n=39) doctoral degree. An analysis of the household income levels revealed that 22.4% (n=114) of participants had an income of 25.000 TL or less, 25.3% (n=129) had an income between 25.001-50.000 TL, 18% (n=92) had an income between 50.001-75.000 TL, 17.5% (n=89) had an income between 75.001-100.000 TL, and 16.9% (n=86) had an income of 100.001 TL or more. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	N	%		N	%
Gender			**Working Status**		
Female	254	49.8	*Nonworker*	339	66.5
Male	256	50.2	*Worker*	171	33.5
Age			**Province**		
18-22	287	56.3	*Erzurum*	205	40.2
23-27	137	26.9	*Erzincan*	161	31.6
28 and older	86	16.9	*Bayburt*	144	28.2
Education			**Income**		
Associate degree	112	22	*0-25.000*	114	22.4
Bachelor	267	52.4	*25.001-50.000*	129	25.3
Master's degree	92	18	*50.001-75.000*	92	18
PhD	39	7.6	*75.001-100.000*	89	17.5
			100.001-∞	86	16.9

Before addressing the main research questions and testing the hypotheses, it was necessary to conduct a correlation analysis between two key variables. Prior to analyzing any effects, it is important to assess the existence of a relationship between the variables. Given that the assumption of normal distribution was met based on the results presented above, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted (Heiman, 2013). The results revealed that the attitude scale towards immigrants had a significant correlation of 0.863 with the future anxiety scale, 0.783 with the fear of the future sub-dimension, and 0.787 with the hopelessness for the future sub-dimension, all at a 99% significance level.

This study also involved the analysis of the primary hypotheses and sub-hypotheses, which included the examination of moderator effects. To assess these moderator effects, the analytical method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was employed. In this approach, the moderator variable was multiplied by the independent variable to create a new interaction variable. A statistically significant interaction term indicates the presence of a moderator effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). A moderator variable is defined as a third variable, either qualitative or quantitative, that influences the direction or strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

The moderator effect analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro developed by Andrew Hayes (Hayes, 2022). This macro facilitates comprehensive analyses of moderator effects and provides the necessary statistical outputs for interpretation. Moderator analysis is a crucial statistical technique that enhances understanding of how the independent variable affects the dependent variable, while also accounting for the influence of social, psychological, or economic factors on the results (Karataş, 2023, p. 998). As such, this study provides a systematic approach for analyzing moderator variables and offers researchers valuable insights into the dynamics of these interactions.

The tests for the main hypotheses and the sub-hypotheses examining moderator effects were conducted using the SPSS 20 statistical software package. Simple linear regression analysis was employed to test Hypotheses H1 and H2. For the moderator effect analyses, all dependent variables (fear and hopelessness), independent variables (attitudes towards immigrants), and moderator variables (age, gender, city, employment status, education level, income) were standardized to prevent multicollinearity issues. Interaction terms were generated by multiplying the standardized values of the independent variable with each of the standardized moderator variables (Meydan & Şeşen, 2015). These interaction terms were then used to perform the moderator effect analysis.

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to assess the moderator effect of each variable. In this analysis, the effects of the standardized values of the independent variable, the moderator variable, and the interaction term on the standardized values of the dependent variables were examined (Baron & Kenny, 1986). These procedures were repeated for each sub-hypothesis, thereby testing for the moderating effects of demographic factors on the primary hypotheses of the study. The results from the hypothesis tests are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Hypothesis Test Results

	Model Summary				Coefficients			
Hyp.	**Adj.R^2**	**Std. Err.**	**F**	***p***	**β**	**Std. Err.**	**t**	***p***
H1	.612	.595	803.256	.000	.765	.027	28.342	.000***
H2	.618	.629	824.319	.000	.819	.029	28.711	.000***
$H1_a$	.611	.623	267.783	.000	.006	.028	.199	.843
$H1_b$	.612	.623	268.229	.000	-.024	.029	-.836	.404
$H1_c$	.616	.619	273.232	.000	-.067	.031	-2.183	.029**
$H1_d$	.614	.621	271.087	.000	.001	.028	.053	.958
$H1_e$	.611	.623	267.269	.000	-.016	.028	-.564	.573
$H1_f$	.612	.622	268.539	.000	-.040	.027	-1.450	.148
$H2_a$	.619	.617	276.867	.000	-.051	.027	-1.868	.062*
$H2_b$	.623	.613	281.765	.000	.077	.027	2.790	.005***
$H2_c$	.622	.614	279.997	.000	.060	.027	2.202	.028**
$H2_d$	.644	.596	307.951	.000	.128	.027	4.807	.000***
$H2_e$	.621	.615	278.742	.000	.049	.027	1.786	.075*
$H2_f$	.618	.617	276.021	.000	.018	.027	.673	.501

***≤0,01: Regression is significant at the %99 level (2-tailed).
**≤0,05: Regression is significant at the %95 level (2-tailed).
*≤0,10: Regression is significant at the %90 level (2-tailed).

According to the analysis results, it was concluded that the two main hypotheses, which address the central issues and claims of this research, were supported at a 99% confidence level. Specifically, it was found that young people's negative attitudes towards immigrants have a significant impact on their future concerns. Furthermore, the results of both hypothesis tests indicated that the effect size (β) was notably high. A one-unit increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants was associated with a 0.76 increase in young people's future fears and a 0.81 increase in their hopelessness about the future.

The moderator effect analysis revealed that only the age factor produced a significant change in the relationship between attitudes towards immigrants and young people's future fears. Additionally, it was found that gender, employment status, age, city, and education level had a moderating effect on the relationship between attitudes towards immigrants and the perception of hopelessness about the future. As a result, further analyses were conducted to determine which sub-indicators of these moderator variables contributed to the significant results. Specifically, regression analyses were performed for each sub-variable of the demographic factors identified as moderators, with the aim of identifying which specific sub-indicator caused the significant change. In other words, regression analyses were repeated by categorically separating the moderator variables. The results of analyses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Analysis According to Moderating Variables

Hypothesis	Moderator Variable	Categorical Variables	β	p
H1 (NATI → FF)	Age	18-22	.831	.000***
		23-27	.739	.000***
		28 and above	.656	.000***
H2 (NATI → DoF)	Gender	Female	.836	.000***
		Male	.534	.000***
	Working Status	Nonworker	.857	.000***
		Worker	.423	.000***
	Age	18-22	.826	.000***
		23-27	.730	.000***
		28 and above	.645	.000***
	Province	Erzurum	.634	.000***
		Erzincan	.919	.000***
		Bayburt	.924	.000***
	Education	Associate degree	.732	.000***
		Bachelor	.777	.000***
		Master's degree	.822	.000***
		PhD	.870	.000***

***≤0,01: Regression is significant at the %99 level (2-tailed).

The fundamental philosophy behind moderator effect analysis is to examine how the relationship between two variables changes according to a categorical variable. This approach is similar to analyses such as t-tests or ANOVA, which assess the variation of a particular variable based on categorical factors. In this context, the analysis investigates under which conditions the presence of a specific effect is stronger or weaker.

Based on the regression analysis results for the moderator variables, which were conducted in alignment with the hypothesis test results presented in Table 3 and further detailed in Table 4, it can be concluded that the presence of other demographic characteristics—excluding income level—has a significant impact. Additionally, the age variable induces a notable change in both the fear of the future and the sense of hopelessness regarding the future among young people towards immigrants.

First, this effect is evident across the three primary age categories used to separate the impact on the fear of the future in relation to attitudes towards immigrants (β=.765, p=.000). Thus, the effect persists despite age-related changes, though the strength of this effect diminishes with age. Specifically, while young people aged 18-22 exhibit an increased fear of the future due to their attitudes towards immigrants, this effect is less pronounced in individuals aged 23-27, and even less so in those aged 28 and older.

Second, it was found that gender, employment status, age, city of residence, and educational level all play significant roles in shaping the impact of young people's attitudes towards immigrants on their sense of hopelessness about the future. According to the results of the analysis for each of these categorical variables and their subcategories, while the relationship between the two variables does not diminish, the intensity of the effect varies according to demographic factors. Consequently, it was

concluded that the impact of young people's attitudes towards immigrants on their hopelessness about the future is stronger in women than in men.

Regarding another demographic factor, employment status, it was found that young people who are not employed outside of school experience a greater sense of hopelessness about the future than their employed counterparts. With respect to age, attitudes towards immigrants exert a comparatively weaker effect on hopelessness as age increases. In terms of city of residence, young people living in Erzurum demonstrate a relatively weaker impact of their attitudes towards immigrants on their hopelessness about the future, compared to those residing in the other two provinces. Lastly, concerning education level, it was concluded that as young people's educational attainment increases, their attitudes towards immigrants have a stronger influence on their hopelessness about the future.

Each of these findings reveals significant social implications. Indeed, the fact that factors such as education level and age modulate the strength of the hypothesized effects underscores the existence of a broader social reality.

5. Evaluation and Discussion

This study contributes to the migration sociology and social psychology literature by exploring the perspectives of young people in Türkiye, a country significantly affected by migration, and investigates how these attitudes shape their concerns about the future. The field research, conducted within this framework, was carried out in the TRA1 region, a province that is not considered a target area for immigrants and is primarily a transit point during migration movements. The rationale for selecting this region was to examine how the presence of immigrants in the country influences young people, even in areas where they do not have direct contact with immigrants. Indeed, studies conducted in regions with high immigrant populations have shown that negative attitudes towards immigrants, and even xenophobia, have developed (Ankaralı et al., 2017; Çetin & Demirel, 2023; Şengül, 2022). Therefore, investigating the existence of such issues in provinces that are less affected by migration allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of immigration policies.

The analyses reveal that the negative attitudes of young people towards immigrants significantly increase both their fears and feelings of hopelessness about the future. Moreover, this effect was found to be quite substantial. A similar study in the literature examined this effect in the opposite direction, concluding that a strong relationship exists (Aktürk et al., 2024). In a different context, within the scope of this research, the fact that negative attitudes towards immigrants increase concerns about the future can be explained through the integrated threat theory and the competition theory. Negative attitudes towards immigrants often stem from perceiving them as a threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). This perception of immigrants as a threat can generate anxiety about the future. Thus, the results of this study are crucial for confirming these theoretical claims.

Interpreted through the lens of social identity theory, the findings of this study suggest that young individuals' tendency to perceive their own group as superior may foster prejudiced attitudes toward both in-group and out-group members, contributing to the enhancement of self-esteem (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). When individuals define themselves according to their social groups and construct their identities based on these groups, it can result in hostility or negative attitudes towards different groups. Therefore, the high level of negative attitudes towards immigrants among young people in this study, and the fact that these attitudes exacerbate concerns about the future, may indicate that these attitudes arise from perceiving immigrants as a threat to their social identities.

The competition theory, as a third theoretical framework, posits that the sharing of scarce resources and economic competition leads to the development of hostile attitudes towards immigrants. Specifically, individuals who experience unemployment, work in low-status jobs, or live in

economically disadvantaged neighborhoods with racial diversity are more likely to feel economically threatened (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). In regions like TRA1, where employment opportunities are limited, the presence of immigrants is perceived as a threat due to the potential competition for labor. This perception of economic competition further heightens concerns about the future. Therefore, the findings of this study, which show that negative attitudes towards immigrants intensify concerns about the future, support the assumptions of competition theory. In this context, the influence of economic conditions and social dynamics on attitudes towards immigrants becomes increasingly important (Kusow & DeLisi, 2021).

A key finding of this study concerns the moderating factors that shape the relationship between attitudes toward immigrants and future anxiety. Within this framework, 12 moderator effect analyses yielded significant results. First, while some studies in the literature argue that gender does not play a decisive role in shaping attitudes toward immigrants (Çetin & Demirel, 2023; Kaya, 2019; Parsak & Saraç, 2021; Şengül, 2022), others suggest that gender constitutes a significant determinant in the opposite direction (Biehl & Danış, 2020; Kobayashi & Tanaka, 2024; Küçük, 2022; Yeşildağ, 2022). The findings of this study indicate that women are more strongly affected than men by the impact of attitudes toward immigrants on hopelessness about the future. This outcome may be attributed to increasing concerns among women regarding social norm violations, harassment, and perceived security threats associated with certain immigrant behaviors (Papadakaki et al., 2021), which appear to intensify their future-related anxieties.

The study also demonstrates that young people's participation in the workforce is a critical factor shaping the impact of immigrant perceptions on future concerns. It was concluded that immigrants are perceived as a socio-economic threat (Köse et al., 2018). According to another perspective, young people's concerns about securing employment influence both their attitudes towards immigrants and their feelings of hopelessness about the future (Şen & Keskin, 2019). A different study suggests that employment-related issues among citizens are a primary antecedent of the anger and negative reactions towards immigrants (Çoban & Gülerce, 2023; Doğan & Ünal, 2021). Consequently, young people who are not employed outside of their education are more affected by immigrant-related attitudes in terms of hopelessness about the future compared to those who are employed. In other words, those who are not economically engaged in working life are more likely to feel hopeless about the future because of immigrants. This finding supports the competition theory, which suggests that individuals not involved in the labor market are more fearful of the presence of immigrants. While employed individuals also experience hopelessness, their attitudes towards immigrants have less of an impact, as they are fewer in number. Therefore, young people who are unemployed are more likely to view the future with hopelessness due to their perceptions of immigrants.

The findings further reveal that the influence of attitudes toward immigrants on future-related fears and hopelessness decreases as participants grow older. This suggests that the development of empathy with age and a reduced perception of immigrants as competitors may explain this outcome. The literature generally indicates that younger people tend to have more positive attitudes towards immigrants (Çetin & Demirel, 2023; Ersoy & Turan, 2019; Sarı, 2023). However, it should be noted that previous studies did not specifically examine young people's concerns about the future. Although younger people may adapt more easily to immigration, it significantly affects their future concerns. This effect tends to decrease with age, possibly because older individuals have more established career paths, which may lessen their anxiety.

The city of residence also plays a significant role in shaping these attitudes. It is likely that young people in Erzurum, one of the three provinces included in this study, are less affected by concerns about the future due to their attitudes towards immigrants, compared to those in other provinces. This

may be attributed to Erzurum's status as a smaller, less metropolitan area. A separate study observed that young people in Istanbul developed more positive attitudes towards immigrants (Demir, 2018). Similarly, in regions like Erzincan and Bayburt, where employment opportunities are more limited, young people's hopelessness about the future is more strongly influenced by their perceptions of immigrants.

An additional significant conclusion from this study is that as the level of education increases, the impact of attitudes towards immigrants on hopelessness about the future becomes more pronounced. This finding may be due to the fact that higher levels of education lead young people to view immigrants as a threat to their social identities. Consistent with the assumptions of social identity theory, the perception that immigrants pose a threat to social identity intensifies as education levels rise (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Thus, an increase in education levels also heightens young people's concerns about the future.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that negative attitudes toward immigrants significantly heighten both fear and hopelessness about the future among young people in Türkiye, even in regions with limited direct immigrant presence. By situating these findings within Integrated Threat Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Competition Theory, the research offers a comprehensive sociopsychological explanation for the mechanisms through which immigration attitudes shape youth well-being. Together, these frameworks illuminate how perceived symbolic, cultural, and economic threats contribute to a broader sense of insecurity among students, underscoring the centrality of migration-related perceptions in the psychosocial development of young adults.

From a policy perspective, these results indicate that youth-oriented interventions should extend beyond purely economic or security-driven strategies and directly address the psychosocial dimensions of migration. Initiatives that foster intergroup contact, empathy, and critical media literacy have the potential to reduce perceived threats and counteract negative narratives surrounding immigrants. Educational programs that encourage perspective-taking and promote constructive dialogue between native-born students and immigrant communities may mitigate the emotional burden of immigration-related fears.

Moreover, targeted career counseling and employment support programs, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions such as the TRA1 region, may help alleviate the resource competition concerns that often drive anti-immigrant attitudes. Such interventions can strengthen students' sense of economic security and reduce anxieties about the future. For higher education administrators and social policymakers, the findings underscore the need for institutional programs that create inclusive campus environments, support intercultural engagement, and facilitate structured opportunities for students to interact with immigrant peers. By reframing immigration as an opportunity for social and cultural enrichment rather than as a threat, these efforts can contribute to greater social cohesion and enhance the overall well-being of young populations.

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