



## The Relationship Between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia: Evidence from Türkiye

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### Abstract

In this study, we examined whether religious attitudes have an effect on xenophobia, which we have witnessed to increase in recent years in Türkiye as well as in the world due to economic, socio-political and other factors, in terms of socio-demographic variables. In this context, our research was conducted to better understand the relationship between xenophobia and religious attitudes. Our sample group consists of 419 people aged between 18 and 56, residing in different provinces of Türkiye. These diverse demographic participants come from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Data were collected online through Google Forms using the Personal Information Form, Religious Attitudes Scale and the Xenophobia Scale. These scales were used to assess participants' demographic information, religious attitudes and attitudes towards xenophobia. The findings of our study reveal that religious attitudes do not directly affect xenophobia in terms of variables such as age, gender, marital status and occupational status. That is, individuals' religious beliefs and the degree of these beliefs do not seem to be an important factor in determining their negative attitudes towards foreigners. Instead, other important factors behind xenophobia were analyzed. In the context of economic threat, remarkable results were obtained. Our research has documented that xenophobic attitudes are higher among individuals with low education and income levels compared to individuals with high income and education levels. This shows how important the impact of economic situation on xenophobia is. Especially in times of increased economic uncertainty and threats, individuals tend to develop negative attitudes towards foreigners. This suggests that economic insecurity may play a fundamental role in increasing xenophobia.

**Keywords:** Migration, Psychology of religion, Religious attitude, Social structure, Xenophobia

Aka, Muharrem & Tapan Metin Gani (2024). The Relationship Between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia: Evidence from Türkiye, *Türkiye Journal of Theological Studies*, 8 (3), 322-341.  
<https://doi.org/tiad.1485130>

Date of Submission	16.05.2024
Date of Acceptance	25.07.2024
Date of Publication	30.09.2024
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## Dini Tutumlar ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı Arasındaki İlişki: Türkiye'den Kanıtlar

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### Öz

Bu çalışmada, son yıllarda dünyada olduğu gibi Türkiye'de de ekonomik, sosyo-politik ve diğer faktörlere bağlı olarak artış gösterdiğine şahit olduğumuz yabancı düşmanlığında dini tutumların etkisi olup olmadığı, sosyo-demografik değişkenler açısından incelenmiştir. Bu kapsamda araştırmamız, yabancı düşmanlığı ve dini tutumlar arasındaki ilişkiyi daha iyi anlamak amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Örneklem grubumuz, Türkiye'nin farklı illerinde ikamet eden, yaşları 18 ile 56 arasında değişen 419 kişiden oluşmaktadır. Bu çeşitli demografik yapıya sahip katılımcılar, farklı sosyo-ekonomik ve kültürel arka planlardan gelmektedir. Veriler, Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Dini Tutum Ölçeği ve Zenofobi Ölçeği kullanılarak Google Formlar aracılığıyla çevrimiçi olarak toplanmıştır. Bu ölçekler, katılımcıların demografik bilgilerini, dini tutumlarını ve yabancı düşmanlığına yönelik tutumlarını değerlendirmek için kullanılmıştır. Araştırmamızın bulguları, dini tutumların yaş, cinsiyet, medeni durum ve mesleki durum gibi değişkenler açısından yabancı düşmanlığını doğrudan etkilemediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Yani, bireylerin dini inançları ve bu inançların derecesi, onların yabancılara karşı olan olumsuz tutumlarını belirlemede tek başına önemli bir faktör olarak görünmemektedir. Bunun yerine, yabancı düşmanlığının arkasındaki diğer önemli faktörler incelenmiştir. Ekonomik tehdit bağlamında ise dikkat çekici sonuçlar elde edilmiştir. Araştırmamız, düşük eğitim ve gelir düzeyine sahip bireyler ile yüksek gelir ve eğitim düzeyine sahip bireylerin yabancı düşmanlığı tutumlarının yüksek olduğunu belgelemiştir. Bu durum, ekonomik durumun yabancı düşmanlığı üzerindeki etkisinin ne denli önemli olduğunu göstermektedir. Özellikle ekonomik belirsizliklerin ve tehditlerin arttığı dönemlerde, bireylerin yabancılara karşı olumsuz tutumlar geliştirme eğiliminde oldukları görülmektedir. Bu da ekonomik güvensizliğin yabancı düşmanlığının artmasında temel bir rol oynayabileceğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din psikolojisi, Dini tutumlar, Göç, Sosyal yapı, Yabancı düşmanlığı,

Aka, Muharrem & Tapan Metin Gani (2024). Dini Tutumlar ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı Arasındaki İlişki: Türkiye'den Kanıtlar, *Türkiye İlahiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8 (3), 322-341.  
<https://doi.org/tiad.1485130>

Geliş Tarihi	16.05.2024
Kabul Tarihi	25.07.2024
Yayın Tarihi	30.09.2024
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## 1. Introduction

Today, the phenomenon of migration and the situation of migrants in host countries are among the main agenda items of many countries. The views of host societies towards immigrants also affect the socio-political climate of the country. At the same time, while societies are expected to better understand each other as a result of the increase in sociocultural interaction with globalization, the rise of xenophobia creates a reverse image. In this context, it is important to understand the key factors and local dynamics that determine attitudes towards migrants in the context of xenophobia.

A holistic definition of xenophobia is "attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors that reject, exclude, and often vilify people based on the perception that they are foreign to the community, society, or national identity".<sup>5</sup> Yakushko, highlighted the psychological dimension of the issue, by defining xenophobia as a form of hatred that includes emotions, attitudes and behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Residents of the host country are often unwelcoming to migrants due to psychosocial factors such as conservative beliefs about migration, attitudes towards national identity, religious beliefs, and incompatible values. This situation contributes to the belief that migrants are a constant threat to the country and emphasizes intergroup differences, leading to the development of in-group favoritism processes (i.e., the preference and favoring of individuals belonging to a particular social group can also lead to discriminatory behavior towards out-group members.<sup>7</sup>

Türkiye hosts mostly Syrian but also Iraqi, Afghan, Iranian, and other Middle Eastern countries, as well as Russian and Ukrainian migrants.<sup>8</sup> After the civil war in Syria, millions of Syrians migrated to Türkiye and other neighboring countries. According to the latest available figures from the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), there are more than 5.1 million foreign nationals present in Türkiye, 3.8 million of whom are seeking international protection. Most are Syrians (3.435.298 individuals) who have been granted temporary protection status (IOM 2023). Considering Türkiye's current economic and social indicators, such a large migrant population is a serious burden on the country. This socioeconomic situation may be a reason for the rise in xenophobia.

It is well documented that many different factors are involved in forming attitudes towards migrants. The research shows that negative attitudes towards immigrants are based on many different reasons. It is considered that migration causes fear of economic competition in the host society and is also perceived as a threat because it damages cultural values and homogeneity of the population.<sup>9</sup> Anti-immigrant tendency is observed especially among socioeconomically vulnerable individuals and groups with higher conservative tendencies.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, anti-migrant sentiment is more

<sup>5</sup> ILO vd., *International Migration, Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2001), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Oksana Yakushko, "Xenophobia: Understanding the Roots and Consequences of Negative Attitudes Toward Immigrants", *The Counseling Psychologist* 37/1 (2009), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Tajfel - John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin - Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole, 1979), 42; H Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations", *Annual Review of Psychology* 33/1 (1982), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Franck Düvell, "Shifts in the Global Migration Order and Migration Transitions in Europe: The Cases of Turkey and Russia", *Comparative Migration Studies* 8/1 (2020), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Peer Scheepers vd., "Ethnic Exclusionism in European Countries. Public Opposition to Civil Rights for Legal Migrants as a Response to Perceived Ethnic Threat", *European Sociological Review* 18/1 (2002), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Moshe Semyonov vd., "The Rise of Anti-Foreigner Sentiment in European Societies: A Cross-National Multi-

pronounced in places where there is a large influx of migrant populations and where the economic situation is poor. The reasons for the rising anti-immigrant sentiment in Türkiye, where a large number of migrants live, have attracted the attention of researchers. In a study examining anti-immigrant discourses on social media in Türkiye, it was determined that security-based anti-immigrant discourses were determinant and that the discourses with security concerns included economic, security, sociocultural and political concerns.<sup>11</sup> Another study found that economic, security, and cultural threat perceptions increased xenophobic attitudes towards Syrians.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, far-right parties are believed to reinforce these attitudes.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the perception of immigrants as a threat to host society is an important reason for the increase in xenophobia.

Previous studies have documented the impact of religious attitudes on anti-immigrant attitudes in the context of different religions (Christianity)<sup>14</sup> and racial/religious classifications (White Christians)<sup>15</sup>. Some studies have found that religious attitudes increase anti-immigrant attitudes in different dimensions.<sup>16</sup> Bohman and Hjerm examined the effect of different religious contexts on negative attitudes towards outgroups and found that strongly religious people are more anti-immigrant than non-religious people. It has also been stated that in countries where Catholicism is predominant, there is a tendency to be more anti-immigrant.<sup>17</sup> Kumpes found that Roman Catholics, who define themselves as highly religious and perceive immigrants as a cultural threat, exhibit more negative attitudes towards immigrants.<sup>18</sup> In a meta-analysis conducted by Deslandes and Anderson, it was determined that samples with religious affiliation adopted more negative attitudes towards immigrants than those without religious affiliation and that Muslims had more negative attitudes towards immigrants than Christians.<sup>19</sup>

In studies conducted in Türkiye, it has been determined that xenophobia towards Syrians has emerged in different forms and degrees, with class differences, political views, and religious backgrounds being effective.<sup>20</sup> Aktaş et al. found that blind patriotism, religiosity, and conservatism are associated with negative attitudes towards immigrants. Getmansky, Sınmazdemir, and Zeitzoff explained the reasons for anti-immigrant

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Level Analysis", *American Sociological Review* 71 (2006), 438.

<sup>11</sup> Didem İşçi - Esra Uludağ, "Sosyal Medyada Suriyeliler Algısı: Youtube Sokak Röportajları Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Ullisa: Uluslararası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 3/1 (2019), 1-24.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmet Türk vd., "Suriyelilere Yönelik Tehdit Algısının Yabancı Düşmanlığına (zenofobi) Etkisi", *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 34/1 (2024), 167-176.

<sup>13</sup> Lauren M. McLaren, "Anti-Immigrant Prejudice in Europe: Contact, Threat Perception, and Preferences for the Exclusion of Migrants", *Social Forces* 81/3 (2003), 924; Gallya Lahav, "Public Opinion Toward Immigration in the European Union: Does It Matter?", *Comparative Political Studies* 37/10 (2004), 1158; Bayram Koca - Selman Saç, "Korkuyu Politikleştirmek, Öfkeyi Örgütlemek: Fransa'da (reconquête) Ve Türkiye'de (zafer Partisi) Aşırı Sağ", *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 79/2 (2024), 325-350.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew L Whitehead vd., "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election", *Sociology of Religion* 79/2 (2018), 152.

<sup>15</sup> Joshua T Davis - Samuel L Perry, "White Christian Nationalism and Relative Political Tolerance for Racists", *Social Problems* 68/3 (01 Ağustos 2021), 523.

<sup>16</sup> Josip Kumpes, "Religioznost I Stavovi Prema Imigrantima U Hrvatskoj", *Migracijske i etničke teme / Migration and Ethnic Themes* 34/3 (2018), 278.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Bohman - Mikael Hjerm, "How the Religious Context Affects the Relationship Between Religiosity and Attitudes Towards Immigration", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37/6 (2014), 943.

<sup>18</sup> Kumpes, "Religioznost I Stavovi Prema Imigrantima U Hrvatskoj", 293.

<sup>19</sup> Christine Deslandes - Joel R. Anderson, "Religion and prejudice toward immigrants and refugees: A meta-analytic review", *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 29/2 (2019), 132.

<sup>20</sup> Cenk Saraçoğlu - Danièle Bélanger, "Loss and Xenophobia in the City: Contextualizing Anti-Syrian Sentiments in Izmir, Turkey", *Patterns of Prejudice* 53/4 (2019), 374.

sentiment in Türkiye as increased unemployment, economic burden, security threats, and changes in ethnic balance.<sup>21</sup> In addition, rising rents, increased crime, unemployment, and problems of adaptation were found to be the causes of anti-immigrant sentiment.<sup>22</sup> In a study conducted in the context of Syrians, it was determined that an increase in the frequency of contact and weakening of the social dominance orientation led to a decrease in perceived cultural threat, thus weakening xenophobic attitudes.<sup>23</sup> A different study found that the perception that immigrants increase crime rates in the local population in Türkiye leads to hesitation to communicate with them and an increase in xenophobic attitudes.<sup>24</sup> Finally, as President Erdoğan emphasizes, intolerance towards refugees in Türkiye already exists and is increasing significantly among people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In conclusion, religious attitudes influence prejudice, discrimination, and xenophobia against migrants at different forms and levels.<sup>25</sup>

Few studies have examined religious attitudes and xenophobia in Türkiye. Morgül and Savaşkan found that religious motives have a reducing effect on prejudices against Syrian refugees among conservative Sunni Muslims, but such motives are not strong enough to overcome personal economic concerns.<sup>26</sup> Alakoc et al. emphasized that in a Muslim-majority country where a conservative government is in power, the religious framework is less influential in individuals' attitude formation towards refugees than humanitarian or economic considerations. In a Muslim-majority country with a conservative government in power, the religious framework is less influential than humanitarian or economic considerations in shaping individuals' attitudes towards refugees.<sup>27</sup> In a study of 97 Muslim refugees in Türkiye, religious participation was found to have a negative relationship with prejudice and a positive relationship with social inclusion.<sup>28</sup> Sağır and Paloutzian in their research It was also determined that more positive religious attitudes led to a decrease in prejudice against immigrants and that women's religious attitudes were more positive than men's. In the same study, it was found that participants with a lower monthly income had higher religious attitudes and lower social distance scores.<sup>29</sup> In another study, it was determined that there was a strong relationship between xenophobia and perceptions of economic, security, and cultural threats, and that perceptions of economic, security, and cultural threats against Syrians were significant predictors of xenophobia.<sup>30</sup> These results suggest a multidimensional and complex relationship between xenophobia and religious attitudes. Therefore, there is a need for

<sup>21</sup> Anna Getmansky vd., "Refugees, Xenophobia, and Domestic Conflict: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Turkey", *Journal of Peace Research* 55/4 (2018), 491-507.

<sup>22</sup> Pelin Budak vd., "Yerel Halkın Algısında Suriyeli Sığınmacılar ve Toplumsal Etkileri: Elazığ İli Örneği", *The Journal of Academic Social Science* 62/62 (2019), 543-564.

<sup>23</sup> Sumeyra Sarıdağ - Hamza Bahadır Eser, "Gruplar Arası Temas, Sosyal Baskınlık Yönelimi ve Zenofobi Arasındaki İlişkide Algılanan Tehdidin Rolü İzmir Konak Örneği", *Journal of Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty* 10/1 (2023), 418-445.

<sup>24</sup> Tekin Avaner - Leyla Ocaklı, "Kent Güvenliği ve Düzensiz Göç Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme: İzmir'de Zenofobi ve Suç Korkusu", *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 13/4 (2024), 1504-1529.

<sup>25</sup> M. Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum* (İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2018), 106.

<sup>26</sup> Kerem Morgül - Osman Savaşkan, "Identity or Interests? Religious Conservatives' Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey", *Migration Studies* 9/4 (2021), 1645-1672.

<sup>27</sup> Burcu Pınar Alakoç vd., "Political Discourse and Public Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey", *Comparative Politics* 54/3 (2022), 547-571.

<sup>28</sup> Mehmet Çetin, "Effects of Religious Participation on Social Inclusion and Existential Well-Being Levels of Muslim Refugees and Immigrants in Turkey", *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 29/2 (2019), 64-76.

<sup>29</sup> Zeynep Sağır - Raymond F Paloutzian, "Religious Attitudes, Demographic Variables, and Prejudice Toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Local Data and International Differences", *Journal of Middle East and Migration Studies* 10/20 (2020), 279-304.

<sup>30</sup> Türk vd., "Suriyelilere Yönelik Tehdit Algısının Yabancı Düşmanlığına (zenofobi) Etkisi", 172.

more studies on religious attitudes and xenophobia in Türkiye, where many immigrants live.

While the ruling party AKP and the center-right party in Türkiye are trying to calm the tension with the discourse of Islamic brotherhood, the political discourses of the opposition parties cause migrants, especially Syrians, to be perceived as a threat and xenophobia to rise.<sup>31</sup> As it is known, 10 years ago, the perspective towards foreigners in Turkish society was in a friendly situation shaped by the concepts of religious brotherhood, *incar-muhajir* relationship and historical loyalty. Today, as can be seen from social media and other communication tools, it is understood from political discourses and posts that xenophobia has increased significantly, and that it would be right to deport all immigrants.

Türkiye is home to many Muslim immigrants, mostly from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. Considering the last 13 years in which we have witnessed intense migration flows, it is important to examine the impact of religious attitudes on the xenophobic attitudes of the local population with a focus on the socio-political climate, economic, and political developments shaped by religious brotherhood discourses. In this sense, the present study aims to reveal the extent to which religious attitudes are effective in determining the dimensions of xenophobia, which has recently increased towards immigrants, especially Syrians, in Türkiye.

## 2. Method

In this study, in which the relationship between xenophobia and religious attitudes was investigated, a correlation method was used in quantitative research designs. This method is a type of analysis used to show whether there is a relationship between two or more variables, and if there is, the direction and strength of this relationship.<sup>32</sup> In line with this model, the relationship between xenophobia and religious attitude was examined using the variables of age, gender, city of residence, employment status, family income level, marital status, and educational status.

### 2.1. Sample Group

The population of the study consists of individuals between the ages of 18-56 living in different provinces of Türkiye. The fact that the sample group was selected from the provinces with a dense Syrian population in Türkiye means that it includes individuals with different demographic characteristics. This increases the likelihood that the sample is more representative of the population. Convenience sampling method was used to provide speed and practicality to the study. In this method, a situation close to the researcher and easy to reach is selected and the number of people to be sampled continues until the desired sample size is reached.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.2. Data Collection and Data Collection Tools

In this study, information collection and measurement tools consisting of the Personal Information Form, OK Religious Attitude Scale, and Xenophobia Scale were used. Ethical

<sup>31</sup> Recep Gulmez, "The Securitization of the Syrian Refugee Crisis Through Political Party Discourses", *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20/3 (2019), 902.

<sup>32</sup> Işık Kabakçı Yurdakul, "Evren ve Örneklem", *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, ed. Adile Aşkı Kurt (Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi Açık Öğretim Fakültesi Yayınları, 2013), 150.

<sup>33</sup> Işık Kabakçı Yurdakul, "Evren ve Örneklem", *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, ed. Adile Aşkı Kurt (Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi Açık Öğretim Fakültesi Yayınları, 2013), 83.



permission was obtained from the Kilis 7 Aralık University Ethics Committee with the decision number E.48654. In addition, the study adhered to the research principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The data were collected voluntarily. The research data were collected using Google Forms, an Internet-based application. Information about the tools used in the data collection is as follows:

**Ok Religious Attitude Scale:** This scale was developed by Ok to measure the level of religiosity of individuals. The scale was prepared by taking into account the three elements of attitude emphasized in social psychology, cognitive, emotion and behavior, and a 4-subdimensional scale was developed by adding a relational dimension based on the centrality of God in religion.<sup>34</sup> The Likert-type scale consisted of eight items. Participants rated their agreement with the statements on the items by scoring 1 as "Strongly Disagree" and 5 as "Strongly Agree." A high score indicates a high level of religiosity, and a low score indicates a low level of religiosity. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed that the scale had high internal consistency (.81 and .91, respectively).

**Xenophobia Scale:** The xenophobia scale is a scale developed by Van der Veer et al.<sup>35</sup> Within the scope of adaptation into Turkish by Özmete, Yıldırım and Duru, 3 items of the scale were removed and an 11-item, single-factor and Likert-type structure was obtained. Scaled between 1 (Strongly disagree) and 6 (Strongly agree), the highest score is 66 and the lowest score is 11. The 8th item is reverse coded and a high score indicates a high level of xenophobia, while a low score indicates a low level of xenophobia. In the Turkish validity study, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.87.<sup>36</sup>

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The data collected in the study were analyzed using SPSS (v29). In this study, the relationship between age, gender, city of residence, employment status, family income level, marital status and educational status and total and mean scores of religiosity and xenophobia were analyzed. Normality analysis was performed to check whether the obtained data met the parametric conditions. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine univariate normality (-0.985, 1.214) and it was determined that these values were between -1.5 and 1.5. Therefore, it was concluded that the data had a univariate normal distribution.

## 3. Findings

**Table 1: Demographic Data of Participants**

Variables	n	%
1 Age Group	18-22	58,2
	23-27	33,4
	28-32	1,4
	33-37	2,1

<sup>34</sup> Üzeyir Ok, "Dini Tutum Ölçeği: Ölçek Geliştirme ve Geçerlik Çalışması", *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 8/2 (2011), 528-549.

<sup>35</sup> Kees van der Veer vd., "Cross-National Measure of Fear-Based Xenophobia: Development of a Cumulative Scale", *Psychological Reports* 109/1 (2011), 27-42.

<sup>36</sup> Emine Özmete vd., "Yabancı Düşmanlığı (Zenofobi) Ölçeğinin Türk Kültürüne Uyarlanması: Geçerlik Ve Güvenirlilik Çalışması", *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi* 40/2 (2018), 204.



	38 and over	20	4.8
2. Gender	Female	304	72.6
	Male	115	27.4
3. City of residence	Gaziantep	114	27.2
	Kilis	111	26.5
	Şanlıurfa	66	15.8
	Hatay	51	12.2
	Kahramanmaraş	15	3.6
	Adıyaman	11	2.6
	Adana	44	10.5
	Van-Bitlis-Muş	7	1.7
4. Employment status	Student	383	91.4
	Employee	31	7.4
	Unemployed	4	1.0
	Housewife	1	.2
5. Family income level (Turkish lira)	1- 9.999	167	39.9
	10.00 - 14.999	130	31.0
	15.000 - 19. 999	61	14.6
	20.000 - 24.999	30	7.2
	25.000 and over	31	7.4
6. Marital status	Married	37	8.8
	Parents together	349	83.3
	Divorced family	14	3.3
	One or both parents are missing	19	4.5
7. Education Level	Primary education	10	2.4
	High School	18	4.3
	Associate degree	9	2.1
	Bachelor	371	88.5
	Master	11	2.6

Sociodemographic information of the individuals participating in the study, such as age, gender, city of residence, employment status, family income level, marital status, and educational status are given in Table 1. 72.6% of the participants were female and 27.4% were male. Considering the age variable, it is seen that the participants vary between the ages of 18 and 56 and 58.2% of them are between the ages of 18-22. According to the city of residence, 27.2% of the participants live in Gaziantep, 26.5% in Kilis and 15.8% in Şanlıurfa. While 91.4% of the participants were students, 7.4% were employed in a regular job. According to income status, 39.9% of the participants stated that their income was less than 10,000 TL, while 31% stated that their income was between 10,000 and 15,000 TL. According to marital status, 83.3% of the participants stated that they were with their parents and 8.8% stated that they were married. As for the education level, 88.5% of the participants chose bachelor's degree.

**Table 2: The Relationship Between Religious Attitude and Xenophobia According to Gender Variable**

Scales	Gender	n	f	Sx	t-test		
					Sd	t	p
Religious Attitude	Female	304	4.42	.45	417	-.699	.486
	Male	115	4.46	.58			

	Cognitive	Female	304	4.84	.57	417	.450	.653
		Male	115	4.81	.55			
	Affective	Female	304	4.19	.82	417	-.046	.963
		Male	115	4.20	1.01			
	Behavioural	Female	304	3.95	.81	417	-2.152	.033
		Male	115	4.15	.88			
	Relationship	Female	304	4.71	.51	417	.182	.856
		Male	115	4.70	.61			
	Xenophobia	Female	304	4.90	1.04	417	-.608	.544
		Male	115	4.96	.96			

As seen in the table, there was no statistically significant relationship between the religious attitude scale ( $p=.486$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) and xenophobia scale ( $p=.544$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) according to the gender variable of the participants. This shows that the mean xenophobia scores of women ( $x=4.90$ ) and men ( $x=4.96$ ) towards immigrants are similar. Likewise, the mean scores of men ( $x=4.42$ ) and women ( $x=4.46$ ) on religious attitudes were not very different. Similarly, it was found that there was no significant relationship between the cognitive, sensory, and relational dimensions of religious attitude according to the gender variable, but there was a significant relationship between the behavioral dimension, which is a subscale of religious attitude, and gender ( $p=.033$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). When the mean scores of the behavioral dimension are examined, it is seen that the behavioral sub-dimension scores of men ( $x=4.15$ ) are higher than those of women ( $x=3.95$ ), which shows the reason for this significant relationship.

**Table 3: Relationship between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia by Age Groups**

Scales	Age Groups	n	X	Sx	Sd	F	p	Significance
Religious Attitude	1. 18-22	244	35.17	4.07	4-414	4.134	.003	1<5 2<5
	2. 23-27	140	35.44	3.75				
	3. 28-32	6	37.67	2.42				
	4. 33-37	9	35.22	4.12				
	5. 38 and over	20	38.60	1.79				
Xenophobia	18-22	244	54.35	11.23	4-414	1.073	.369	
	23-27	140	53.77	11.21				
	28-32	6	51.83	8.84				
	33-37	9	47.67	15.39				
	38 and over	20	56.40	9.25				

According to the analyses, there was a statistically significant relationship between the age groups of the participants and their religious attitude scores ( $p=0.003$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), but no significant relationship was found between age groups and xenophobia scores. According to the results of the post hoc test (multiple comparisons), the religious attitude score in the 1st group was lower than that in the 5th group in the significant difference between age groups and religious attitudes. Again, according to the results of the post-hoc test, the scores of the participants in the 2nd group were significantly lower than those in the 5th group. It was also found that the religious attitude scores of the individuals in the 5th group were higher than those of the individuals in the 1st and 2nd groups. No significant relationship was found between age groups and xenophobia scores ( $p=0.369$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), but according to age groups, the mean xenophobia score of those

in the 38 and above age group was the highest ( $\bar{X}=56.40$ ), whereas the mean xenophobia score of those in the 33-37 age group was the lowest ( $\bar{X}=47.67$ ).

**Table 4: Relationship between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia According to Cities of Residence**

Scales	City	n	$\bar{X}$	Sx	Sd	F	p
Religious Attitude	Gaziantep	114	35.07	4.17	7-4111	1.325	.237
	Kilis	111	35.24	3.85			
	Şanlıurfa	66	35.59	3.73			
	Hatay	51	35.88	3.78			
	Kahramanmaraş	15	35.13	3.02			
	Adıyaman	11	37.18	2.82			
	Adana	44	36.39	4.06			
	Van-Bitlis-Muş	7	33.14	5.46			
Xenophobia	Gaziantep	114	55.26	11.95	7-411	1.393	.206
	Kilis	111	52.12	12.51			
	Şanlıurfa	66	53.62	10.50			
	Hatay	51	52.92	10.03			
	Kahramanmaraş	15	56.07	9.04			
	Adıyaman	11	53.64	11.27			
	Adana	44	57.41	7.88			
	Van-Bitlis-Muş	7	54.00	10.91			

According to the analyses, no statistically significant relationship was found between the religious attitudes ( $p=.237$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) and xenophobia ( $p=.206$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) scores of the participants according to the city in which they lived. When the table is analyzed, it is seen that the participants have similar mean scores for their religious attitudes according to the city in which they live. Here, it was found that the mean religious attitude score of the individuals living in Van-Bitlis-Muş ( $\bar{X}= 33.14$ ) was lower than that of the other cities, and the city with the highest mean religious attitude score was Adıyaman ( $\bar{X}=37.18$ ). Again, when the xenophobia scores of the participants according to the cities they lived in were analyzed, it was seen that the highest mean xenophobia score was Adana ( $\bar{X}=57.41$ ) and the lowest mean xenophobia score was Kilis ( $\bar{X}=52.12$ ) and Hatay ( $\bar{X}=52.92$ ).

**Table 5: The Relationship Between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia According to Employment Status**

Scales	Employment Status	n	$\bar{X}$	Sx	Sd	F	p
Religious Attitude	Student	383	35.30	3.92	3-415	8.394	.001
	Employee	31	38.10	2.48			
	Unemployed	4	33.75	3.30			
	Housewife	1	24.00	.			
Xenophobia	Student	383	53.89	11.38	3-415	.537	.657
	Employee	31	55.65	9.78			
	Unemployed	4	58.50	3.11			
	Housewife	1	60.00	.			

According to the analyses, there was a statistically significant relationship between the working status of the participants and their religious attitude scores ( $p<.001$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). However, since there should be more than one case in at least one group (the number of housewives is 1) for the post hoc tests that should be performed to determine which groups have a significant relationship, the analysis could not be performed. There was no statistically significant relationship between employment status and xenophobia scores ( $p=.657$ ;  $p<0.05$ , respectively). According to the averages of the participants' employment status and xenophobia scores, the student group had the lowest xenophobia score.

**Table 6: The Relationship Between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia According to Family Income Level**

Scales	Income Level	N	X	Sx	Sd	F	P	Significance
Religious Attitude	1- 9.999	167	35.69	3.81	4-414	1.567	.182	
	10.00 - 14.999	130	35.45	3.68				
	15.000 - 19. 999	61	35.95	3.91				
	20.000 - 24.999	30	34.23	4.26				
	25.000 ve üstü	31	34.52	5.01				
Xenophobia	1. 1- 9.999	167	53.63	11.58	4-414	3.832	.005	3<2 3<5
	2. 10.00 - 14.999	130	55.71	9.62				
	3. 15.000 - 19. 999	61	49.79	12.93				
	4. 20.000 - 24.999	30	54.63	12.03				
	5. 25.000 ve üstü	31	57.52	8.69				

As seen in Table 7, as a result of the analyses, no statistically significant relationship was found between the income levels of the participants and their religious attitude scores ( $p=.182$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), while a significant relationship was found between their income levels and xenophobia scores ( $p=.005$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). According to the post-hoc test results, the significant difference between the income level groups was between the 2nd group and the 3rd group. Individuals in the 2nd group had higher xenophobia scores than those in the 3rd group did. Similarly, there was a significant relationship between xenophobia in the 5th group and xenophobia in the 3rd group, and xenophobia was higher in individuals with income levels in the 5th group than in individuals with income levels in the 3rd group.

**Table 7: Relationship between Religious Attitudes and Zenophobia According to Marital Status**

Scales	Marital Status	N	X	Sx	Sd	F	p	Significance
Religious Attitude	1.Married	37	37.62	2.92	3-415	4.206	.006	2<1
	2.Parents together	349	35.26	3.90				
	3.Divorced family	14	35.29	5.76				
	4.One or both parents are missing	19	35.05	3.58				
Xenophobia	Married	37	52.68	11.66	3-415	.260	.855	
	Parents together	349	54.25	11.16				
	Divorced family	14	54.50	10.23				

One or both parents missing	19	53.26	12.59				
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As seen in Table 7, as a result of the analyses, a statistically significant relationship was found between the marital status of the participants and their religious attitudes ( $p=.006$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), while no significant relationship was found between their marital status and xenophobia ( $p=.855$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). According to the results of the post hoc test, there is a significant relationship between those who are married and those whose mothers and fathers are together. The religious attitude scores of those who were married were higher than those of those whose parents were together.

**Table 8: The Relationship Between Religious Attitudes and Xenophobia According to Educational Background**

Scales	Education Status	N	X	Sx	Sd	F	p
Religious Attitude	Primary education	10	37.30	2.71	4-414	718	.580
	High School	18	34.94	5.10			
	Associate degree	9	35.89	5.01			
	Bachelor	371	35.41	3.84			
	Master	11	36.00	4.96			
Xenophobia	Primary education	10	52.70	10.07	4-414	1.790	.130
	High School	18	53.44	13.49			
	Associate degree	9	45.00	15.41			
	Bachelor	371	54.27	11.03			
	Master	11	57.27	8.50			

As seen in Table 9, as a result of the analyses, no statistically significant relationship was found between religious attitudes ( $p=.580$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) and xenophobia ( $p=.130$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) according to the educational status of the participants. The average religious attitudes of the participants according to their educational status were similar. When the relationship between educational status and xenophobia was examined, it was observed that the group with the lowest average xenophobia score was the associate degree graduates ( $X=45.00$ ). The group with the highest mean xenophobia score was the master's degree graduates ( $X=57.27$ ).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years, anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes have increased worldwide. This study analyzed the extent to which religious attitudes were effective in promoting xenophobic attitudes in Türkiye in terms of socioeconomic variables.

The first finding of this study is the effect of gender on xenophobic attitudes. It is noteworthy that previous studies have had different results regarding the effect of gender on xenophobic attitudes. Studies have shown that men have more negative attitudes than women do.<sup>37</sup> In different studies, it has been stated that women have higher xenophobic

<sup>37</sup> Joel Anderson - Rose Ferguson, "Demographic and Ideological Correlates of Negative Attitudes Towards Asylum Seekers: A Meta-Analytic Review", *Australian Journal of Psychology* 70/1 (2018), 18-29; Misha Mei Cowling vd., "Prejudice-Relevant Correlates of Attitudes Towards Refugees: A Meta-Analysis", *Journal of Refugee Studies* 32/3 (2019), 502-524; Mehmet Ali Padir - Özgür Erdur-Baker, "Syrian Refugees and Xenophobia: The Role of Gender, Education, Perceived Economic Income, and Age", *Erzincan Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 25/1 (2023),

attitudes.<sup>38</sup> Similar to Aydın et al., our findings revealed that gender did not affect xenophobic attitudes.<sup>39</sup> This indicates that gender alone does not explain xenophobic attitudes and that many different variables are effective in anti-immigrant attitudes and xenophobia. On the other hand, although men's religious behavior scores (worship and religious rituals) were higher than those of women, this was not found to be effective for xenophobic attitudes. In other words, it can be said that although men engage in relatively more religious behaviors, this is not effective in the development or strengthening of xenophobic attitudes.

Contrary to results suggesting that aging increases xenophobia/anti-immigrant sentiment,<sup>40</sup> our findings show that there is no significant relationship between age and xenophobia, confirming previous studies.<sup>41</sup> This result can be explained in the context of the limited sample group, which is a limitation of our study. On the other hand, previous studies<sup>42</sup> have emphasized that age does not affect religious attitudes among university students, and our findings, as expected, show that age increases religiosity. Moreover, the level of xenophobia was found to be quite high in all age groups. Although these results reflect a limited sample, the high level of xenophobic attitudes is a problem that should be further examined by both policymakers and researchers.

The provinces with the lowest xenophobic attitudes were Kilis and Hatay, where many Syrian immigrants live. This result, as emphasized in previous studies,<sup>43</sup> can be interpreted as an increase in positive contact between local people and immigrants, leading to a decrease in xenophobic attitudes.

Our other finding was that occupational status had a negative effect on religious attitudes and xenophobia. However, since the number of women in the sample group was insufficient, the relationship between religious attitudes and xenophobia in which occupational status could not be determined. However, previous studies have similarly

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162-169.

<sup>38</sup> Sahar Obeid vd., "Xenophobic Attitudes, Behaviors and Coping Strategies Among Lebanese People Toward Immigrants and Refugees", *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 55/4 (2019), 710-717; Behçet Kaldık, "Ulusallararası Göç Bağlamında Sığınmacılara Yönelik Yabancı Düşmanlığının İncelenmesi: Türkiye'de Xenofobi Üzerine Bir Uygulama", *Bingöl Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 5/Ulusallararası İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Kongresi: Krizler, Belirsizlikler ve Arayışlar Özel Sayısı (2021), 69-96.

<sup>39</sup> Nilüfer Aydın vd., "Social Exclusion and Xenophobia: Intolerant Attitudes Toward Ethnic and Religious Minorities", *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 17/3 (2014), 371-387.

<sup>40</sup> Bohman - Hjern, "How the Religious Context Affects the Relationship Between Religiosity and Attitudes Towards Immigration"; Johannes Beller, "Xenophobia trends in Germany: Increasing negative attitude towards foreigners in younger birth cohorts", *The Social Science Journal* 60/2 (2023), 172-178; Padir - Erdur-Baker, "Syrian Refugees and Xenophobia".

<sup>41</sup> Aydın vd., "Social Exclusion and Xenophobia"; Svenja Kopyciok - Hilary Silver, "Left-Wing Xenophobia in Europe", *Frontiers in Sociology* 6 (2021), 666-717.

<sup>42</sup> Mehmet Çınar, "Yas Psikolojisi: Yas ve Dindarlık İlişkisi Üzerine Ampirik Bir Araştırma", *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12/Volume 12 Issue 2 (2019), 57-74; Sağır - Paloutzian, "Religious Attitudes, Demographic Variables, and Prejudice Toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Local Data and International Differences", 284.

<sup>43</sup> Hediye Hilal Özkeçeci, *Gruplararası Temas ve Tehdit Algısının Türkiye'deki Suriyelilere Yönelik Önyargıdaki Rolü* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2017), 62; Özge Yanbolloğlu, *Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Duygular Ve Algılanan Sosyal Mesafede, Gruplararası Pozitif Ve Negatif Temas, Sosyal Baskınlık Yönelimi, Gruplararası Tehdit Ve Gruplararası Kaygının Rolü* (Bursa: Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2018), 73; Cengiz Erişen, "Causes and Consequences of Public Attitudes toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey", *Contemporary Research in Economics and Social Sciences* 2/1 (03 Haziran 2018), 111-139; Mehmet Ali Padır, *Examining Xenophobia in Syrian Refugees Context: The Roles of Perceived Threats and Social Contact* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, The Graduate School Of Social Sciences, 2019); Sağır - Paloutzian, "Religious Attitudes, Demographic Variables, and Prejudice Toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Local Data and International Differences".284.

emphasized that occupational status affects xenophobia.<sup>44</sup> As expected, individuals working in unemployed or precarious jobs may have more xenophobic attitudes due to employment anxiety. This result may also be associated with the perception of migrants as economic threats.

Income level has no significant effect on religious attitudes. However, similar to previous studies,<sup>45</sup> the results of this study suggest that individuals with low-income levels have higher levels of xenophobia. Another study reported that not only the absolute income level but also the relative income distribution among local community members increases xenophobic attitudes.<sup>46</sup> A surprising result of the study was that xenophobia levels were higher in participants with higher income. When this result is analyzed with a focus on the economic threat model, it can be interpreted that high-income individuals in Türkiye, as in other countries, see immigrants as an economic threat, which increases xenophobic attitudes.<sup>47</sup>

In line with previous studies,<sup>48</sup> the results of this study show that marital status has no effect on xenophobic attitudes. Consistent with similar studies,<sup>49</sup> low educational levels positively affect xenophobic attitudes. According to human capital theory, although it has been reported that highly educated individuals have lower anti-immigrant attitudes,<sup>50</sup> the results of this study suggest that the xenophobic attitudes of individuals with higher education levels are relatively higher. When this result is evaluated according to the competition threat model, an increase in the number of immigrants, which is called the outgroup, and the deterioration of economic conditions will most likely increase xenophobic attitudes. In the context of global economic problems, unemployment, and economic instability, highly educated individuals perceive immigrants to be a threat. This can be explained by the fact that employment and other occupational concerns are important reasons for the development of xenophobic attitudes among highly educated individuals.

The primary migrant population in Türkiye is composed of individuals from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and other predominantly Muslim countries. This demographic composition could be a reason why migrants are not perceived as a religious threat. In summary, our study's findings indicate that while religious attitudes

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<sup>44</sup> Mikael Hjerm - Kikuko Nagayoshi, "The Composition of the Minority Population as a Threat: Can Real Economic and Cultural Threats Explain Xenophobia?", *International Sociology - INT SOCIOLOG* 26 (2011), 822.

<sup>45</sup> Hjerm - Nagayoshi, "The Composition of the Minority Population as a Threat", 835; Padir - Erdur-Baker, "Syrian Refugees and Xenophobia", 171.

<sup>46</sup> Sascha Riaz, "Does Inequality Foster Xenophobia? Evidence from the German Refugee Crisis", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50/2 (2024), 359-378.

<sup>47</sup> Bart Meuleman, "Perceived Economic Threat and Anti-Immigration Attitudes: Effects of Immigrant Group Size and Economic Conditions Revisited", *Cross-Cultural Analysis: Methods and Applications*, ed. E. Davidov vd., European Association for Methodology series (New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 281-310; Egle Gusciute vd., "One Hundred Thousand Welcomes? Economic Threat and Anti-Immigration Sentiment in Ireland!", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45/5 (2022), 829-850.

<sup>48</sup> Viviana Andreescu, "A Multilevel Analysis of Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in France.", *Journal of Identity & Migration Studies* 11/1 (2017); Barış Eriçok - Duran Mavi, "Xenophobia Perceptions of Turkish University Students: An Investigation According to Various Variables", *Participatory Educational Research* 11/1 (2024), 38.

<sup>49</sup> Cowling vd., "Prejudice-Relevant Correlates of Attitudes Towards Refugees", 512; Alessandro Indelicato - Juan Carlos Martín, "The Effects of Three Facets of National Identity and Other Socioeconomic Traits on Attitudes Towards Immigrants", *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, (2023).

<sup>50</sup> Elisa Rustenbach, "Sources of Negative Attitudes Toward Immigrants in Europe: A Multi-Level Analysis", *International Migration Review* 44/1 (2010), 61.



have a limited impact on xenophobia, economic factors play a more significant role in shaping public opinion.

As a result, the limited number of participants is the main limitation of this study. Anti-immigrant sentiment in Türkiye has been on a serious rise in recent years. As can be seen from our results, economic and other social factors are more effective in increasing xenophobia than religious attitudes. For this reason, it is important to investigate the causes of xenophobia in terms of economic problems and media influence with a larger sample group in future studies.

<b>Peer-Review</b>	Double anonymized - Two External
<b>Ethical Statement</b>	* It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. * (Kilis 7 Aralık University Rectorate, Ethics Committee Decision was taken with the decision dated 27.03.2023, numbered E.48654 of the Presidency of the Publication Ethics Committee.)
<b>Plagiarism Checks</b>	Yes - Turnitin
<b>Conflicts of Interest</b>	The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.
<b>Complaints</b>	<a href="mailto:turkiyeilahiyat@gmail.com">turkiyeilahiyat@gmail.com</a>
<b>Grant Support</b>	The author(s) acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research.
<b>Author Contributions</b>	Design of Study: 1. Author (%60), 2. Author (%40), Data Acquisition: 1. Author (%60), 2. Author (%40), Data Analysis: 1. Author (%60), 2. Author (%40), Writing up: 1. Author (%50), 2. Author (%50), Submission and Revision: 1. Author (%90), 2. Author (%10),
<b>Değerlendirme</b>	İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Köleme
<b>Etik Beyan</b>	*Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. *(Kilis 7 Aralık Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, Yayın Etiği Kurulu Başkanlığının 27.03.2024 Tarih, E.48654 Nolu kararı ile Etik Kurul Kararı alınmıştır.)
<b>Benzerlik Taraması</b>	Yapıldı – Turnitin
<b>Etik Bildirim</b>	<a href="mailto:turkiyeilahiyat@gmail.com">turkiyeilahiyat@gmail.com</a>
<b>Çıkar Çatışması</b>	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.
<b>Finansman</b>	Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.
<b>Yazar Katkıları</b>	Çalışmanın Tasarlanması: 1. Yazar (%60), 2. Yazar (40), Veri Toplanması: 1. Yazar (%60), 2. Yazar (%40), Veri Analizi: 1. Yazar (% 60), 2. Yazar (%40), Makalenin Yazımı: 1. Yazar (%60), 2. Yazar (%40), Makale Gönderimi ve Revizyonu: 1. Yazar (%80), 2. Yazar (%20)

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