Losing Territorial Sovereignty and Resource Access: Computational Text Evidence from Turkiye

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Abstract

This article investigates the sources of elite perceptions of territorial sovereignty loss and resource access anxiety in maritime disputes, arguing that adversaries' unilateral geopolitical actions—bilateral maritime boundary agreements, offshore licensing, and resource discoveries—trigger domestic anxieties by altering the perceived territorial status quo. Using novel data from Turkish parliamentary speeches (1996–2024) and employing computational text analysis techniques including multilingual FastText embeddings, dynamic keyATM topic modeling, and BERT-based sentiment analysis, I show that offshore licensing causes bipartisan perception of potential territorial sovereignty loss, while resource discoveries fuel anxieties about resource access. Maritime boundary agreements show more nuanced effects, increasing emphasis on resource access among governments while decreasing it for opposition. These findings shed new light on the escalation of maritime disputes by showing how unilateral geopolitical moves by adversaries can trigger bipartisan anxieties over territorial sovereignty and resource access, thereby increasing the likelihood of military escalation aimed at averting perceived losses.

Introduction

What drives the perceptions of loss of sovereignty and resource access anxiety in territorial disputes? Traditionally, declining profitability of conquest and the emergence of territorial integrity norms have constrained states' ability to conquer new territories in the post-WWII era (Gartzke, 2007; Zacher, 2001; Coe and Markowitz, 2021; Altman, 2020). However, the number of new disputes over maritime territory has grown in the same period (Hensel et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2020; LaSpisa, 2025). These factors that have constrained land-based territorial conquest are less effective in containing maritime conflict for two reasons. First, contested offshore areas often hold substantial reserves of oil and natural gas—a development spurred by the advent of offshore oil extraction technologies in the post-WWII era that enhances the economic profitability for territorial acquisition (Nyman, 2015; Owsiak and Mitchell, 2019; Mitchell, 2020; Coe and Markowitz, 2021; LaSpisa, 2025). Second, rules in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) create legal uncertainty over maritime boundaries, allowing multiple states to claim rightful ownership of the same contested areas (Yüksel, 2024). This legal uncertainty diminishes the constraining effect of the territorial integrity norms at sea (Glaser, 2013; LaSpisa and Mitchell, 2025).

Legal uncertainty over ownership of maritime territory creates a strategic environment in which states perceive rival advances as potential territorial losses that constrain their access to the resource potential of the disputed areas. Under such uncertainty, individuals exhibit loss-averse preferences: Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1982) highlight that the pain of losing hurts more than the satisfaction of equivalent gains, making people more willing to take risks to avoid or recover losses than to pursue gains. This logic implies that when states perceive a threat of territorial loss, they will favor riskier military options to forestall those losses rather than seeking equivalent territorial gains (Levy, 1996, 2000; Butler, 2007; Levy and Thompson, 2011). Recent work shows that loss framing can produce issue indivisibility

in territorial disputes (Zhou, Goemans and Weintraub, 2025), and governments can simultaneously deploy territorial loss and energy security frames to rally support for the use of force, co-opt domestic opposition, and signal greater resolve to adversaries during territorial bargaining over maritime boundaries (Gur, 2025). However, we know very little about what causes elite perceptions of losing territorial sovereignty and resource access.

I argue that three types of geopolitical events can trigger these perceptions by leading to de facto changes in the existing territorial status quo: (1) bilateral maritime boundary agreements that exclude rival claimants, prompting excluded states to view such agreements as threats to their territorial sovereignty and future resource access; (2) offshore licensing of exploration and extraction rights to foreign firms, which directly provokes sovereignty anxiety by altering the status quo on the ground and internationalizing disputes through entrenched third-party economic interests; and (3) major discoveries of offshore oil or gas reserves, which amplify the economic and strategic value of contested maritime areas and induce anticipatory anxieties among rival states who fear exclusion from current and future resource flows. Even when internal partisan divides exist within a state, these events may provoke bipartisan perceptions of territorial sovereignty and resource anxiety, as opposition parties also face political incentives to emphasize threats to territorial sovereignty and resource access rather than directly challenging the government's territorial claims.

To test my argument, I constructed a novel dataset comprising Turkish parliamentary speeches delivered between 1996 and 2024, explicitly addressing territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Relevant speeches were systematically identified through keyword-based searches and validated qualitatively, resulting in a corpus of 912 parliamentary statements. Additionally, I compiled detailed annual dispute-level data on maritime boundary agreements, offshore licensing rounds, energy resource discoveries, and militarized disputes within the region. To analyze elite perceptions of these disputes, I employed a combination of unsupervised and semi-supervised computational text analysis methods. First,

I utilized multilingual FastText word embeddings, pretrained on the full Turkish Wikipedia corpus, to assess how sovereignty and resource-related themes co-occur within parliamentary discourse. The results demonstrated that these themes consistently cluster together in a two-dimensional vector space, suggesting that political elites frequently integrate narratives of territorial sovereignty with concerns over energy security.

Building on this, I applied a semi-supervised dynamic keyATM topic model using theoretically relevant keywords derived from the embeddings. This approach enabled the systematic identification and quantification of sovereignty and resource-related topics across individual speeches. I then used these topic proportions as the dependent variables in statistical analyses. The results show that offshore licensing significantly increases elite concerns over territorial sovereignty, with significant effects observable among both government and opposition actors. Additionally, major offshore energy resource discoveries amplify anxieties related to resource access. In contrast, maritime boundary agreements show no consistent direct impact; however, nuanced heterogeneous effects suggest that the governing party tends to marginally increase its emphasis on resource-related discourse following such events. These results shed new light on the causes of territorial sovereignty and resource access anxiety in disputes over maritime territory.

This article makes important contributions to multiple literatures in international relations. First, it advances research on resources and territorial disputes (Hensel et al., 2008; Owsiak and Mitchell, 2019; Mitchell, 2020; LaSpisa, 2025) by empirically demonstrating that access to offshore resources significantly shapes parliamentary debates over territorial sovereignty. Specifically, the findings show that adversaries' offshore licensing activities generate bipartisan perceptions of potential territorial losses, while subsequent discoveries of offshore energy resources heighten anxieties about future resource exclusion. While most existing studies rely on cross-sectional dyadic data to evaluate the presence of resources as a binary explanatory factor for dispute onset and militarization (Hensel et al., 2008; Mitchell,

2020; Yüksel, 2024), this article introduces a prospect-theoretic framework that highlights how the perceived threat of exclusion—rather than the mere presence of resources—reshapes domestic reference points and increases incentives to escalate. In doing so, it offers a new explanation grounded in loss aversion for why some maritime disputes over resource-rich areas turn militarized in response to adversarial actions.

Second, this study contributes to research on the domestic politics of territorial claims. While recent scholarship suggests that governments may avoid pursuing resource-rich territorial claims due to concerns about uneven distributional consequences that could trigger domestic opposition (Lee, 2024*a*,*b*), I offer an alternative logic. When adversaries initiate de facto changes to the territorial status quo, opposition parties may find it politically more advantageous to criticize the government for failing to protect national sovereignty and resource access, rather than oppose the underlying territorial claim. The results support this expectation: rather than polarizing debate, offshore licensing and energy discoveries appear to generate rhetorical convergence among government and opposition actors. This suggests that elite perceptions of territorial loss and resource insecurity can override distributional concerns, reinforcing nationalist alignment in the face of perceived external threats.

Literature Review and Theory

Since the late 20th century, the frequency of territorial wars has consistently declined. This decline is attributed to two main factors: the reduced profitability of territorial conquest and the emergence of territorial integrity norms. First, some scholars argue that incentives for territorial conquest have waned as the economic gains from coercive rent extraction have diminished, a process influenced by factors such as nationalism, capital flight, and free trade (Kaysen, 1990; Rosecrance, 1999; Gartzke, 2007; Gartzke and Hewitt, 2010). Nevertheless, this argument does not fully explain why states may refrain from capturing resource-rich

territories. While some contend that energy-importing states may find it profitable to seize such areas (Coe and Markowitz, 2021), others have found that states dependent on energy export revenue are more likely to adopt assertive strategies to capture resource-rich territories (Markowitz, 2020; Markowitz et al., 2020; Markowitz, 2023).

Second, the emergence of the territorial integrity norm in the international system has constrained states' ability to conquer new territories. This norm evolved under U.S. leadership following World War II and was endorsed by international organizations such as the UN. In the aftermath of two devastating global conflicts and with the looming threat of nuclear war, there was widespread recognition that territorial disputes significantly increased the risk of major conflicts. The norm reduces territorial aggression by fostering both a fear of international retaliation and a moral obligation among nations to respect established borders (Zacher, 2001; Hensel, Allison and Khanani, 2009; Altman, 2020). However, Altman (2020) recently found that the territorial integrity norm did not eliminate territorial conquest altogether but rather altered its form, with challenger states increasingly targeting small, sparsely populated territories lacking defensive military garrisons.

Maritime disputes have become increasingly prevalent in the post-1945 era despite the broader trends indicating a decline in the profitability of territorial conquest and the emergence of territorial integrity norms designed to constrain aggression (Hensel et al., 2008; Nemeth et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2020; Yüksel, 2024; LaSpisa, 2025). Figure 1 displays the number of active maritime boundary disputes and new offshore resource discoveries by region. First, many contested offshore areas contain substantial reserves of economically critical resources, notably oil and natural gas, which can significantly increase the economic profitability associated with capturing maritime territories and increase the tangible salience of maritime claims (Owsiak and Mitchell, 2019; Mitchell, 2020; LaSpisa, 2025). Indeed, Nyman (2015) demonstrates that developments in offshore resource extraction technologies have systematically increased the frequency with which states militarize maritime disputes.

Figure 2 further illustrates the geospatial evolution of offshore resource discoveries over the last century by resource type.

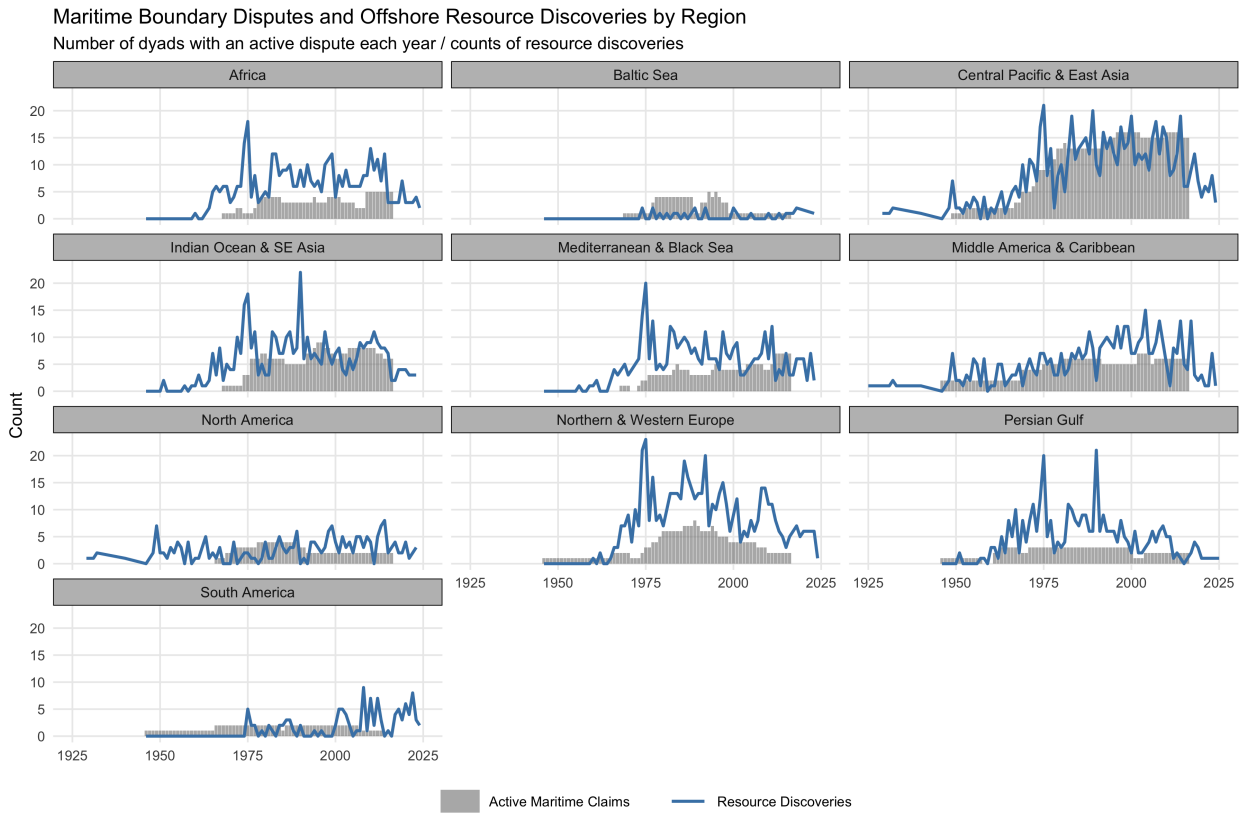

Figure 1: Created using data from the Maritime Boundary Making Dataset (Yüksel, 2024) and GEM Oil and Gas Tracker Dataset

Second, territorial integrity norms are looser in maritime disputes compared to disputes over land territories (Shaffer, 2011; Glaser, 2013; Yüksel, 2024; LaSpisa and Mitchell, 2025). This is because maritime disputes typically involve competing sovereignty claims over areas where territorial boundaries have not yet been clearly defined or legally settled. On land, clearly demarcated borders, combined with international recognition and enforcement mechanisms, significantly raise the normative and diplomatic costs associated with territorial aggression. In contrast, maritime boundaries often remain ambiguous and subject to divergent interpretations under international law, particularly within the framework provided by

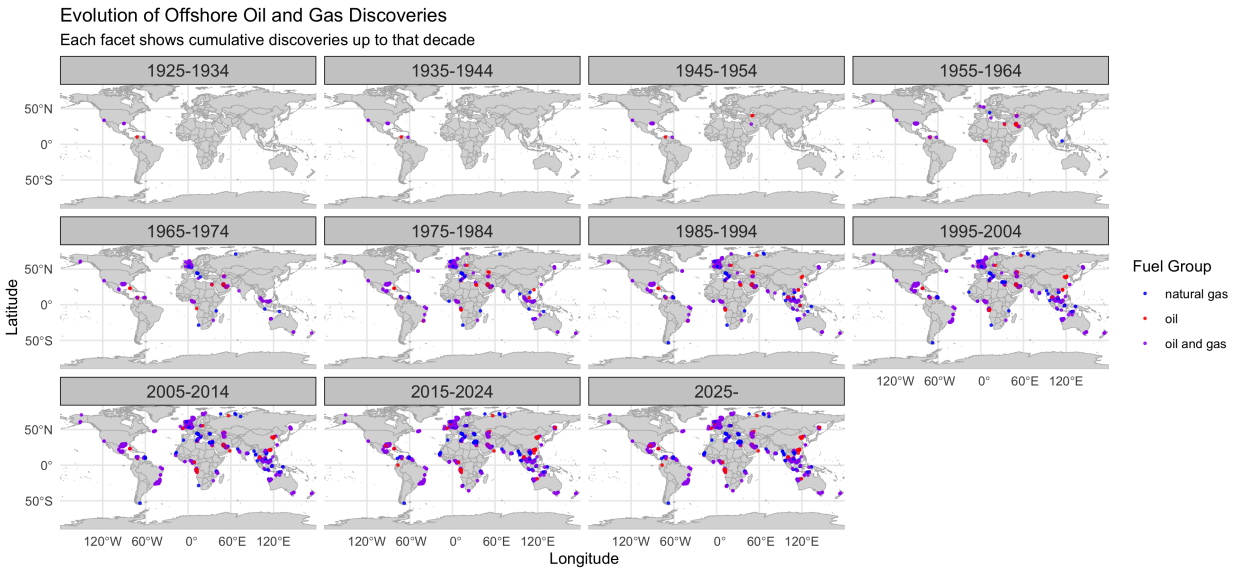

Figure 2: Hundred Years of Offshore Energy Discoveries: Created using the GEM Oil and Gas Tracker Dataset

the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Although UNCLOS establishes general guidelines, such as granting states' rights over Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) extending up to 200 nautical miles, it leaves considerable room for conflicting claims, especially in areas with overlapping jurisdictions or disputed island sovereignty (Nemeth et al., 2014; Østhagen, 2020; Yüksel, 2024). Consequently, the inherent legal uncertainty surrounding maritime borders lowers the normative barriers against unilateral state behavior, weakening the constraining influence of territorial integrity norms in maritime disputes.

This legal uncertainty over ownership has important implications for whether states assess maritime disputes as potential territorial gains or losses. According to prospect theory, as articulated by Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1982), decision-makers evaluate outcomes relative to a reference point and are particularly sensitive to losses, often weighing the pain of a loss more heavily than the benefit of an equivalent gain. For example, consider a student aiming to achieve a grade of 90 on an exam. In this case, the student's reference point is the target score of 90; receiving any score above 90 will be viewed as a gain, whereas any score below 90 will be perceived as a loss. This shows that if the point of reference shifts, individuals' preferences may also change, even when the underlying facts and probabilities remain constant.

Some scholars have previously applied prospect theoretic logic to understand the escalation of territorial disputes (Levy, 1996, 2000; Levy and Thompson, 2011; Butler, 2007; Braniff, 2018; Zhou, Goemans and Weintraub, 2025). This logic suggests that states are more inclined to take risks to avoid territorial losses than to achieve equivalent territorial gains. In other words, a state may be more likely to go to war to prevent losing territory than it would be to acquire new territory with similar value (Levy, 2000; Levy and Thompson, 2011). In maritime disputes, prospect theoretic logic implies that conflict escalation may be driven more by the defensive reaction to avoid perceived territorial losses than by the offensive desire for territorial expansion.

In territorial disputes, reference points are essential benchmarks defining what constitutes a territorial gain or loss. States could base their reference points on genuine or aspirational levels. It is often difficult to pinpoint genuine reference points as territorial bargaining unfolds in a highly strategic environment in which states are motivated to influence the reference points of adversaries and frame any concessions they might make as incurring unacceptable losses while portraying any compromises by their adversaries as merely foregone gains (Levy, 2000; Butler, 2007). Gur (2025) argues that governments strategically frame maritime disputes as potential territorial losses and simultaneously deploy energy security narratives to gather public support, constrain domestic opposition, and signal stronger resolve to adversaries in territorial disputes. By portraying concessions as significant losses, leaders tie their hands domestically to shift the adversary's reference point.

On the other hand, the existing status quo often serves as a reference point in territorial disputes. For instance, in maritime disputes, where boundaries often remain undelimited, the prevailing status quo typically functions as the default reference point. Under such circumstances, any unilateral geopolitical maneuver by an adversary that shifts this status quo is perceived as a loss, prompting states to respond aggressively to prevent de facto territorial changes. While existing research on prospect-theoretic applications in international relations has examined the consequences of loss framing, there is little research on the sources of elite perceptions of territorial sovereignty loss and resource access.

Whether a state perceives itself to be in the domain of potential territorial losses or gains may depend on decisions taken by adversaries in maritime disputes. I argue that three types of geopolitical moves can trigger elite perceptions of loss of territorial sovereignty and resource access: (1) bilateral maritime boundary agreements, (2) offshore licensing, and (3) the discovery of energy resources. Each of these events can shift the perceived status quo, either by formalizing control over contested maritime territory or by altering expectations about the value and future accessibility of resources in disputed areas.

First, maritime disputes are characterized by legal uncertainty over ownership (Yüksel, 2024), and states often attempt to settle these disputes through bilateral negotiations. Nemeth et al. (2014) find that Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) declarations increase the frequency of such negotiations by clarifying ambiguous boundaries and promoting bilateral resolution. Nonetheless, bilateral agreements frequently provoke diplomatic backlash from excluded states that claim overlapping maritime rights. When two states sign a boundary agreement that disregards a third party's claims, the excluded state may perceive this as a threat to both its territorial sovereignty and its future access to offshore resources. For example, Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have long-standing disputes over the offshore gas fields known as Dorra (Arash) in the Persian Gulf. These disputes date back to the 1960s, when Iran awarded offshore exploration rights to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, while Kuwait granted similar rights to Royal Dutch Shell, resulting in overlapping claims in the northern part of the field. The issue was reignited in 2001 when Iran initiated unilateral drilling activities in the field, prompting Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to formalize a maritime boundary agreement that included provisions for the joint development of offshore resources (Forbes, 2005). Diplomatic tensions further escalated in 2022 when Saudi Arabia and Kuwait signed a memorandum of understanding for joint resource exploration. In response, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh declared the agreement illegal and emphasized that Iran reserves the sovereign right to exploit and invest in disputed maritime zones. This case illustrates how bilateral agreements that exclude claimants can escalate diplomatic tensions and reinforce perceptions of sovereignty erosion (Al Jazeera, N.d.; Hrioua, 2023).

Another example is the 2019 maritime boundary agreement signed between Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord, which delineated Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) across contested areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. The agreement disregarded the claims of Greece, prompting regional backlash. The European Union condemned the deal and responded by imposing sanctions on individuals and entities involved in Turkey's subsequent

drilling activities in disputed maritime zones. These measures included asset freezes and travel bans, and have been extended annually, with the most recent renewal lasting until November 30, 2025 (Council of the EU, 2024). This logic leads to my first hypothesis:

H1 (Boundary Agreement): When a foreign adversary signs a bilateral maritime boundary agreement that excludes other claimants, it will increase anxiety about territorial sovereignty and resource access in domestic elite discourse of the excluded states.

Second, states may unilaterally declare EEZs to initiate offshore resource exploration, particularly when they possess the technological and administrative capacity to do so. However, exploration and development involve substantial financial and technical demands that many states cannot meet independently (Nyman, 2015). As a result, states frequently open international licensing rounds to attract investment from multinational energy firms to explore and develop offshore resource fields. These decisions can heighten perceptions of territorial sovereignty loss and fears over diminished access to future resource flows. I argue that offshore licensing escalates sovereignty anxiety among excluded states through two mechanisms.

First, offshore licensing constitutes a direct challenge to traditional notions of territorial sovereignty by establishing legal and operational frameworks for seismic exploration, drilling, and resource extraction in contested maritime zones. By licensing foreign or state-owned firms, states assert control over disputed areas and effectively initiate de facto changes to the territorial status quo by formalizing previously abstract claims. For other claimant states, such actions fuel anxieties about losing territorial sovereignty and future access to resources, thereby increasing the level of risk that leaders and the public are willing to accept to prevent these losses. In response, states often pursue a range of coercive strategies—from diplomatic protests to military escalation—to disrupt offshore exploration activities in contested maritime zones.

In 2014, China's deployment of the HYSY-981 exploratory oil rig in disputed waters near the Paracel Islands triggered a military escalation with Vietnam, which responded by deploying law enforcement vessels. China further escalated with a fleet of approximately 130 vessels, including coast guard and naval ships, declaring the rig a "mobile national territory." Despite this show of force, Vietnam maintained its presence, leading to several clashes and widespread anti-China protests in Vietnam. Although China eventually withdrew the rig one month earlier than planned, many observers attributed this to Vietnam's clear signaling of its risk acceptance to defend its territorial sovereignty (Green et al., 2017, pp. 201–223). A similar escalation occurred in 2000 when Suriname used military force to remove a Canadian drilling rig licensed by Guyana from contested waters, leading to an international crisis. Guyana asserted its right to develop offshore resources, while Suriname claimed territorial violation. The dispute halted development for years until international arbitration ruled in favor of Guyana, declaring Suriname's use of force unlawful (Foek, 2005; Reuters, 2007). These cases illustrate how offshore licensing and exploration can trigger sovereignty anxiety, prompting states to use military force to prevent changes to the territorial status quo.

Second, offshore licensing internationalizes disputes by introducing third-party actors, namely, multinational energy firms and, by extension, their home governments, into what were previously dyadic conflicts. These firms, once granted exploration rights, often begin seismic surveying or exploratory drilling that operationalize the claim and entrench foreign economic interests in the disputed zone. Because many of these firms are headquartered in powerful states, their presence can trigger diplomatic entanglements that complicate the dispute's resolution. For example, the United States initially maintained a neutral stance on maritime disputes between Turkey and Cyprus. However, this posture began to shift following the involvement of U.S.-based energy firms in Cyprus's offshore licensing blocks, such as Noble Energy's (later acquired by Chevron) discovery of the Aphrodite gas field in 2011, and, later in 2017, ExxonMobil's acquisition of an exploration license for concession

Block 10. U.S. foreign policy grew more aligned with the emerging Cyprus–Greece–Israel energy partnership. In 2019, during a visit to Greece, U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo stated, "We've made clear that operations in international waters are governed by a set of rules. We've told the Turks that illegal drilling is unacceptable, and we'll continue to take diplomatic actions to ... ensure that lawful activity takes place." (Reuters, 2019).

For excluded states, this dynamic reduces their bargaining leverage by altering both the legal and political context of the dispute. It becomes more difficult to negotiate directly or bilaterally when the dispute is no longer limited to two national governments but now implicates corporate interests, international legal frameworks governing investment protection, and the foreign policy calculations of third-party states. This embedded web of economic and geopolitical interests further reinforces perceptions of marginalization and long-term loss of territorial control. As a result, excluded states may view such developments not only as threats to their territorial sovereignty but also as structural shifts in power that limit their ability to influence future resource access or regional order. I consider these dynamics in my second hypothesis:

H2 (Offshore Licensing): When a foreign adversary initiates offshore licensing in contested waters, it will increase anxiety about territorial sovereignty loss in domestic elite discourse.

Third, the discovery of offshore oil and gas reserves in or near contested maritime zones may amplify energy access-related anxieties among other disputant states. While legal boundaries may remain unresolved, confirmed discoveries significantly increase the tangible salience of maritime claims (Mitchell, 2020) and elevate the perceived costs of inaction. Unlike exploration over prospective concession blocks, proven reserves raise energy security concerns and may trigger anticipatory fears of exclusion from future revenues and infrastructure development. LaSpisa (2025) finds that discoveries—rather than production—are the

strongest predictors of maritime claim onset, as the discovery phase generates heightened uncertainty over the size, location, and viability of the reserves. This uncertainty, combined with the increased economic and strategic value of contested areas, incentivizes states to make new maritime claims.

Resource discoveries also generate anticipatory anxiety over the potential diffusion of extraction activity into adjacent or geologically continuous zones. Even when discoveries occur outside a state's immediate claim, neighboring states may respond by accelerating their own licensing efforts, reasserting dormant claims, or lodging diplomatic protests—driven by fears that early extraction elsewhere could foreclose access to geologically connected resources. The logic at play is not only about securing what is already known to exist but also about preempting the loss of resources that might be discovered in the future. Therefore, I expect offshore energy discoveries to heighten anxieties over resource access among other disputant states. For example, ExxonMobil's 2015 discovery of vast offshore reserves in Guyana's Stabroek Block triggered a response from Venezuela, which declared the drilling illegal, unilaterally expanded its maritime claims, and issued threats to international firms operating in the area. In 2023, the dispute escalated further when a Venezuelan naval vessel entered Guyanese waters near ExxonMobil's active production sites, prompting Guyana to issue a formal protest and rally international support (Al Jazeera, 2013; AP News, 2023).This expectation is formalized in my third hypothesis:

H3 (Resource Discovery): When offshore energy resources are discovered near contested areas, it will increase anxiety about resource access in domestic elite discourse.

While states may differ internally in their partisan politics, the perception of territorial sovereignty loss or exclusion from resource access can generate bipartisan convergence among the elites, particularly when the triggering event originates from a foreign adversary. Putnam's seminal work argues that international bargaining is best understood as

two-level games, where leaders must simultaneously navigate foreign adversaries and domestic constituents (Putnam, 1988). The stance of domestic political opposition in international disputes can help signal stronger resolve (Fearon, 1994, 1997; Schultz, 1998, 2001; Weeks, 2008; Snyder and Borghard, 2011) and at the same time constrain executive ability to conduct foreign policy when opposition can block and limit political gains from war (Shea, Teo and Levy, 2014; Levy and Mabe, 2004). The literature on the "rally-round-the-flag" effect shows that external threats can produce domestic unity, with public support for incumbents increasing under foreign threat (Mueller, 1970; Brody, 1991). However, the magnitude of the rally effect may be contingent upon several factors such as bipartisan support (Baker and Oneal, 2001; Gowa, 1998; Schwartz and Tierney, 2025), and trust in the government (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003).

Recent work suggests that the unifying impact of external threats is not automatic. Studies emphasize that partisan divisions can persist even under external threat, especially in polarized political environments. Myrick (2021) finds that responses to foreign threats are often filtered through partisan lenses, with elite polarization transforming shared threats into divisive issues. When external threats are framed with partisan cues or interpreted through existing political cleavages, they may deepen rather than reduce polarization. This dynamic is further conditioned by elite distrust, domestic identity divisions, and political ideology. For instance, Carothers (2023) shows that domestic identity divides can prevent unity even under severe external threats, as seen in Taiwan's divided response to Chinese pressure, while South Korea's lack of such identity rifts enabled bipartisan convergence against Chinese sanctions. Kobayashi and Katagiri (2018) demonstrate that in Japan-China territorial disputes, the rally effect did not occur universally but was instead driven by the "reactive liberal" effect—liberals, rather than conservatives, became more supportive of the conservative leader under perceived threat. This highlights that ideological orientation shapes how external threats influence public support for incumbents. Finally, Yeung and Xu

(2025) show that in the United States, bipartisan recognition of the China threat increased support for hawkish foreign policy preferences among both Democrats and Republicans, but did not reduce affective polarization.

Moreover, the domestic distribution of benefits associated with territorial claims can further complicate elite convergence. Some research suggests that governments may refrain from advancing claims over resource-rich territory when the opposition expects an unequal domestic distribution of resource benefits, which can constrain elite consensus and make it difficult for leaders to sustain such claims (Lee, 2024*a*,*b*). However, other studies find that governments can strategically use territorial loss and energy security frames to mobilize public support for the use of force in disputes over resource-rich areas (Gur, 2025). These findings indicate that the impact of external threats on domestic unity is highly conditional, shaped by elite cues, identity divides, ideological predispositions, and the framing of the threat.

In territorial disputes, the political cost of opposing a government's territorial claim can outweigh the benefits of emphasizing potential distributional inequalities, particularly when the dispute involves a rival state or unfolds in a polarized political environment. My argument is straightforward: in disputes centered on core national security issues—such as territorial sovereignty and energy access—adversarial actions that visibly alter the perceived territorial status quo are likely to generate bipartisan elite anxiety. When sovereignty or access to natural resources is perceived to be under threat—whether through offshore licensing, boundary agreements, or resource discoveries—opposition parties may find it politically costly to directly challenge the government's claim. Instead, they are more likely to converge around the defense of national sovereignty, positioning themselves as protectors of national interests rather than undermining the government's bargaining position. Rather than disputing the country's territorial claim itself, opposition parties have greater incentives to shift their criticism toward the government's diplomatic failures or inability to effectively protect

territorial rights. More formally, to test this argument, I consider the following interaction hypotheses:

H1a (Maritime Boundary x Bipartisan): Bilateral maritime boundary agreements that exclude other claimants will lead to bipartisan anxiety about territorial sovereignty and resource access among both government and opposition actors.

H2a (Offshore Licensing x Bipartisan): Offshore licensing in contested waters will lead to bipartisan anxiety about territorial sovereignty among both government and opposition actors.

H3a (Resource Discovery x Bipartisan): Resource discoveries near contested areas will lead to bipartisan anxiety about resource access among both government and opposition actors.

Data and Analysis

To evaluate my argument, I construct a novel dataset of parliamentary speeches delivered in the Turkish Grand National Assembly between 1996 and 2024, focusing specifically on discussions related to territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed) Sea. I compile all available digitized parliamentary records and apply Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to convert scanned documents into machine-readable text. The dataset begins in 1996, as this period marks the increasing prevalence of potential resource discoveries in the region, notably with Israel's identification of minor natural gas fields such as Mari-B and Noa in 1999.

First, to identify speeches addressing territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, I conducted a keyword-based search of Turkish parliamentary transcripts using terms commonly associated with maritime conflicts. These included references to Doğu Akdeniz (East-

ern Mediterranean), Mavi Vatan (Blue Homeland), deniz sınırı (maritime border), deniz yetki alanı (maritime jurisdiction), kıta sahanlığı (continental shelf), and münhasır ekonomik bölge (exclusive economic zone). I then qualitatively assessed all identified speeches to determine whether they explicitly referred to territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. This process yielded 912 parliamentary speeches spanning 1996–2024.

Second, I collected metadata on each speech, including the year, the speaker's party affiliation, and gender. Using this information, I created dummy variables to distinguish between government (1) and opposition (0) speakers, allowing for a comparative analysis of how political alignment shapes discourse on territorial conflict.

Third, I collect new event-level data on territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean. This includes annual records of resource discoveries, maritime boundary agreements, offshore licensing rounds, and militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). These data are drawn from multiple sources, including the Global Energy Monitor Oil and Gas Extraction Tracker, official licensing announcements, the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, and reputable international news outlets such as Reuters, Al Jazeera, and BBC World.

For each of these events, I create dummy variables indicating whether such activities occurred in contested waters in a given year. These variables are later used to evaluate how geopolitical moves of adversarial states trigger perceptions of territorial sovereignty loss and resource access anxiety and influence domestic political alignment between government and opposition actors. Ultimately, I assess how such dynamics contribute to the escalation of these disputes into militarized interstate conflicts.

Empirical Strategy: Word Embeddings, Semi-Supervised Topic Modelling, and Sentiment Analysis

I employ a variety of unsupervised and semi-supervised machine learning and computational text analysis methods to test my hypotheses. First, I use multilingual FastText word embeddings, a pre-trained model trained on all Wikipedia entries in Turkish. Unlike conventional word embedding models, such as Word2Vec, which treat words as single units, FastText decomposes words into character-level subword units (Grave et al., 2018). This approach is particularly advantageous for Turkish, an agglutinative language where meaning is often embedded in suffixes. By leveraging this technique, the model ensures that morphologically similar words are closely positioned in the vector space. This allows me to examine whether resources are discussed in terms of their national security value within the context of territorial disputes.

To prepare the text for these models, I apply several standard preprocessing steps, including tokenization, stopword removal, and stemming, specifically those that are curated for the Turkish language (Bird, Klein and Loper, 2009; Onaldi, 2018). These steps ensure that word representations focus on substantive content rather than grammatical variations. I further apply bigram detection and incorporate both unigrams (individual words) and bigrams (frequently co-occurring word pairs) in my analysis. The inclusion of bigrams enhances contextual understanding, as word meanings can shift when they appear together (Mikolov et al., 2013).

Once processed, each word in the dataset is mapped to a 300-dimensional numerical representation, capturing its contextual meaning based on how it co-occurs with other words in the corpus. The embeddings generated from this process serve as the foundation for the subsequent clustering and visualization steps. Given that each word is initially represented as a high-dimensional vector, visualization requires reducing these dimensions while preserving

semantic relationships. The analysis applies t-Distributed Stochastic Neighbor Embedding (t-SNE), a non-linear dimensionality reduction technique designed to maintain local similarities in high-dimensional data (van der Maaten and Hinton, 2008). This method is effective in capturing word similarities based on their contextual proximity. The application of t-SNE transforms 300-dimensional word vectors into a 2D space, allowing for a visual representation where words with similar meanings appear closer together. In contrast, words that are contextually different are spaced farther apart.

After reducing word embeddings to a 2D representation, K-Means clustering is applied to group words into thematically related clusters. K-means is an unsupervised machine learning algorithm that partitions data into k distinct clusters, where each data point (word) is assigned to the nearest cluster center based on its cosine similarity in the vector space (Pedregosa et al., 2011). These clust To ensure that the results are accessible to a wider audience, key political terms from the Turkish parliamentary corpus are translated into English and annotated in the final visualization.

The clustering of word embeddings in Figure 3 illustrates how energy resources are framed in Turkish parliamentary discussions on Eastern Mediterranean disputes. Words such as "energy," "oil/gas," "security," "sovereignty," and "national" appear in close proximity within the vector space, suggesting that discussions of energy are strongly linked to national security concerns rather than being treated as purely economic issues. The co-location of terms such as "war" and "protection" further reinforces the idea that energy resources are framed as strategic assets, potentially justifying defensive or escalatory actions. The results show that when MPs talk about territorial disputes, they integrate resource-related themes into broader narratives of territorial sovereignty.

Second, I employ a semi-supervised topic modeling approach (dynamic keyATM) that enhances traditional topic models by incorporating predefined keywords and a structured temporal component (Eshima, Imai and Sasaki, 2024). Unlike widely used unsupervised

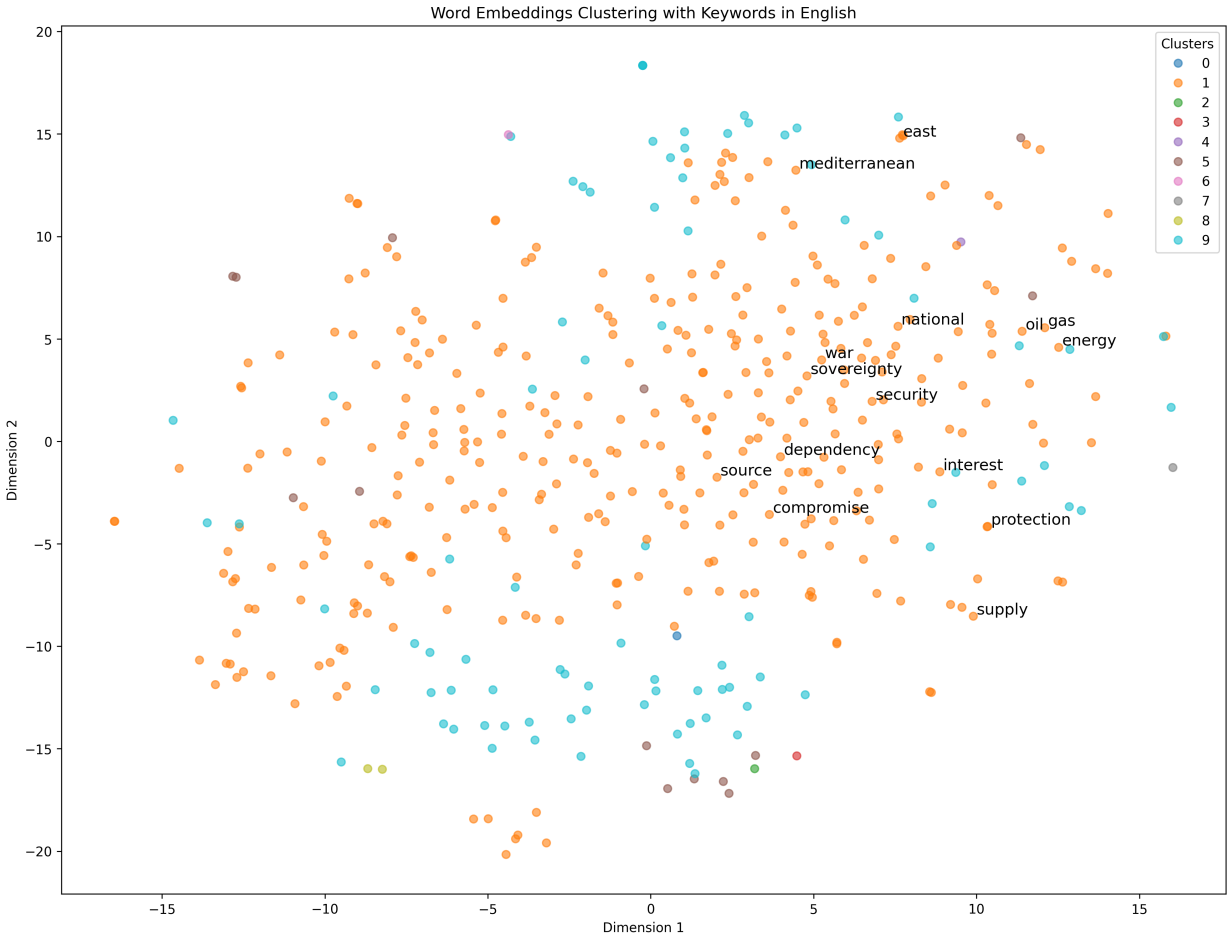

Figure 3: Word Embeddings Clustering of Speeches on Maritime Disputes

models such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) or Structural Topic Models (STM), which often require extensive post hoc interpretation and may generate topics lacking clear substantive coherence, dynamic keyATM improves measurement validity by anchoring topics to theoretically meaningful keywords while still allowing for the discovery of emergent themes. The model balances preselected keywords with data-driven topic discovery, reducing issues like topic overlap and label switching that affect unsupervised models. This balance between supervision and exploration ensures that the estimated topics remain directly aligned with the study's theoretical framework while also capturing broader patterns in the corpus.

To estimate my models, I define two sets of keywords related to resources and sovereignty. For the resource topic, I used the following keywords: enerji (energy), gaz (gas), petrol (oil), kaynak (resources), ulusal (national), çıkar (interest), and savaş (war). For the sovereignty topic, I use egemenlik (sovereignty), bölge (region), birlik (unity), alan (area), hak (right), and koruma (protection). Figure 4 displays the keywords' proportions in identified topics. Keyword proportions above 0.1% indicate that the model's keywords appear a reasonable number of times in the corpus, ensuring that they are meaningfully associated with the latent topic. In addition to these keyword-assisted topics, the model identifies six additional topics.

To further validate these topics, I generate a density plot, Figure 5, illustrating the distribution of the proportions of parliamentary speeches allocated to these topics. The Resources topic is more skewed towards lower proportions, indicating that most speeches allocate a relatively small fraction of their content to this topic. In contrast, the Sovereignty topic has a more even spread, suggesting a relatively higher and more consistent emphasis on the territorial sovereignty across speeches.

Another key advantage of dynamic keyATM is its ability to model time-dependent shifts in topic prevalence through a Hidden Markov Model (HMM) structure, which assumes that each time period belongs to a latent discrete state. This approach allows for smooth temporal transitions, offering a more nuanced understanding of how topics evolve compared to models

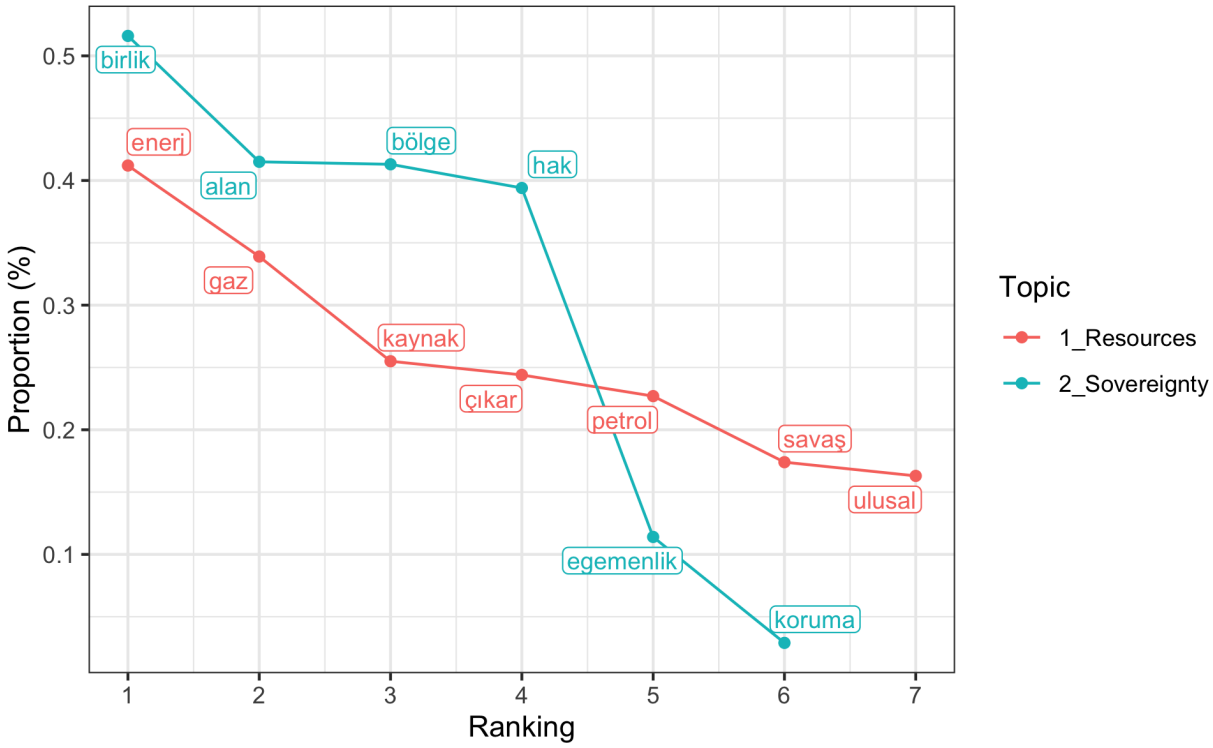

Figure 4: Keyword Proportions

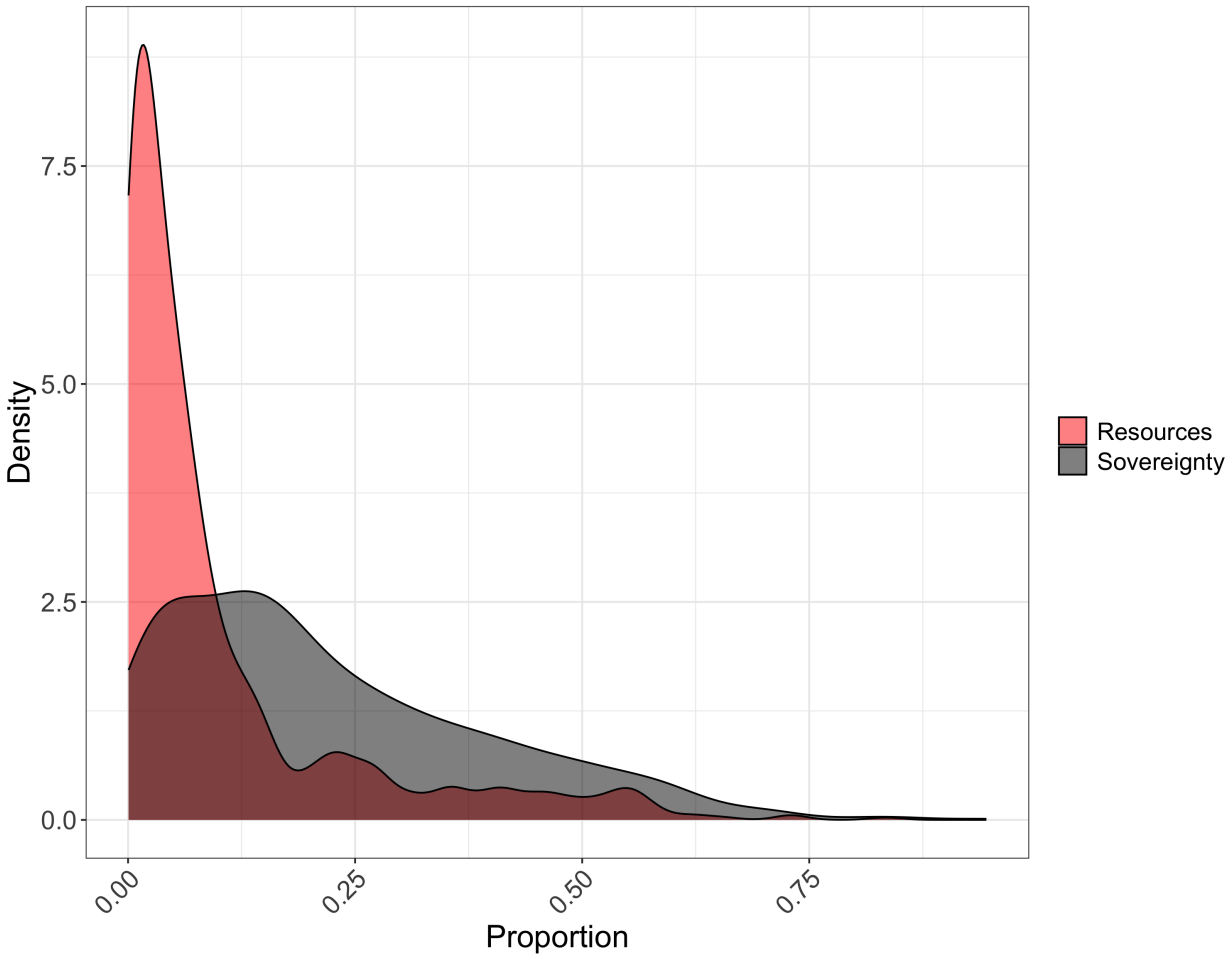

Figure 5: Density Plots for Resource and Sovereignty Topics

that rely solely on time-fixed effects.

Following the estimation of the keyATM model, I calculate the proportion of each speech allocated to each topic (theta values) and use these as dependent variables in subsequent statistical analyses. Figure 6 displays the evolution of these topics over time. The shaded regions (or error bars) represent the 90% confidence intervals, providing a measure of uncertainty around the estimated topic proportions.

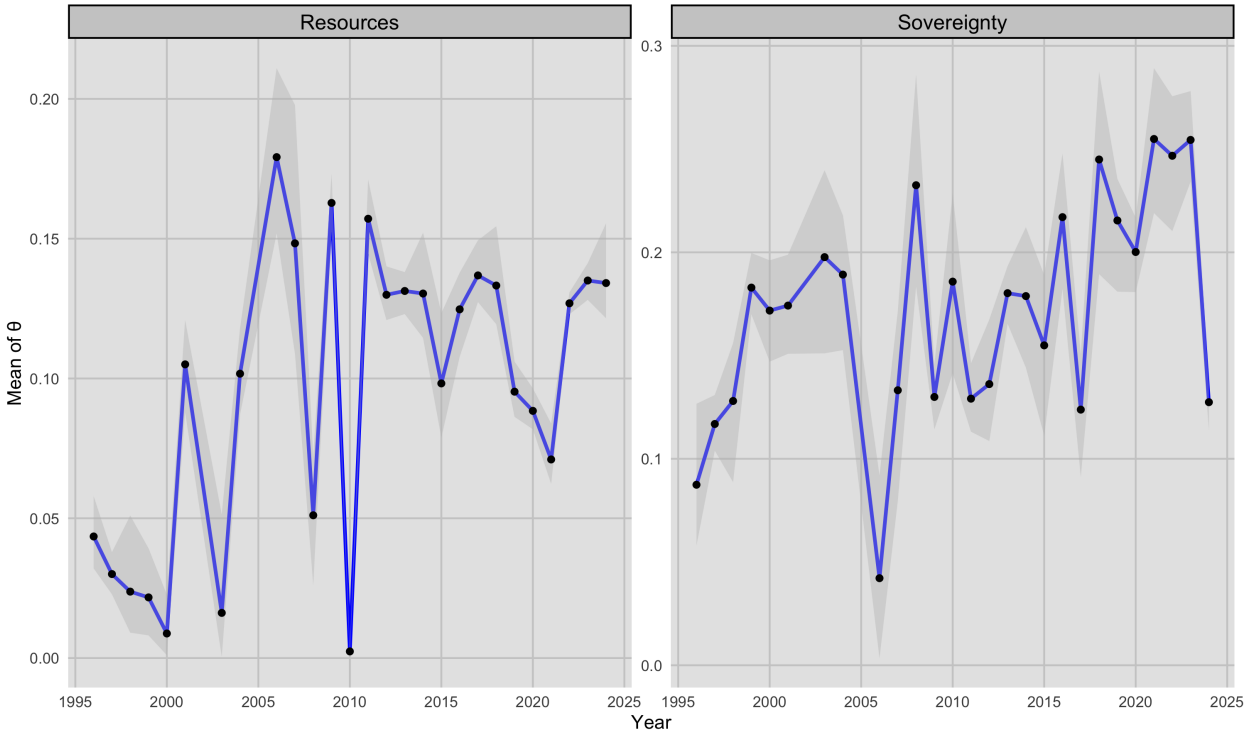

Figure 6: Time Trend of Estimated Topics

Before conducting statistical analysis, I first examine key trends in parliamentary discussions in relation to major regional developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The time trends of resources and sovereignty topics (Figure 5) suggest that parliamentary attention to these issues closely aligns with significant geopolitical events. First, there is an initial increase in discussions in 2007, coinciding with the signing of the first maritime delimitation agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon. This agreement set a precedent for

regional claims over offshore energy reserves and sparked further negotiations among Eastern Mediterranean states. A more pronounced surge occurred in 2010, following the release of the US Geological Survey (USGS) landmark assessment of the region's hydrocarbon potential. The report estimated 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas, highlighting the strategic importance of the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean. The same period also saw increased diplomatic activity, with multiple states initiating offshore licensing rounds. In particular, Cyprus launched its first offshore licensing round in 2007, and subsequent licensing rounds in 2010 and 2011 contributed to the continued increase in parliamentary discussions about energy security and sovereignty.

Following these developments, parliamentary discourse on resource-related issues remained elevated throughout the early 2010s, coinciding with the discovery of significant gas fields, such as Israel's Leviathan field in 2010 and Cyprus's Aphrodite field in 2011. These discoveries intensified regional competition, particularly between Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus, over exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claims. The sharp rise in sovereignty-related discussions in 2019–2020 aligns with Turkey's maritime delimitation agreement with Libya, which provoked naval confrontations between Turkish and Greek forces during Turkey's seismic survey in the disputed area and was met by Greece's own delimitation deal with Egypt. The concurrent surge in resource-related discussions suggests these tensions were not merely about sovereignty but also reflected competition over newly discovered energy reserves. Together, these trends imply that unilateral moves by disputant states can trigger both territorial loss perceptions and resource anxiety.

To further investigate this, I estimate both OLS with party fixed effects and beta regression models using the θ values as the dependent variable, representing the percentage of each speech associated with the identified topics. Since the dependent variable is a percentage constrained between 0 and 1, OLS may occasionally produce predictions outside these limits. To account for this, I also provide results from Beta regression models, which are

better suited for modeling bounded outcomes (Kubinec, 2023). To isolate the effect of my key IVs on elite rhetoric, I include a set of speech-level covariates in each model. I control for speaker characteristics—gender and party position (government vs. opposition)—and include party fixed effects, with additional indicators for speeches delivered by senior office-holders (President, Foreign Minister, Energy Minister, and National Security Minister). To account for the electoral context—when territorial issues may be amplified for competitive or diversionary reasons—I also add election-year fixed effects. Finally, I include the annual count of militarized interstate disputes, since military activity can independently drive both sovereignty and resource access-related content. I also present additional models in the appendix using the lagged version of IVs for robustness. The substantive conclusions remain unchanged.

The results from Table 1 indicate that offshore licensing in contested maritime territories significantly increases the proportion of territorial sovereignty-related discussions in the parliament, reinforcing perceptions of territorial sovereignty loss. In both OLS (Model 1) and Beta Regression (Model 3), offshore licensing is positively associated with sovereignty rhetoric at the $p < 0.01$ level, confirming that these events trigger heightened concerns over sovereignty loss. The interaction term between offshore licensing and party position (Model 2 and Model 4) further suggests that this effect is not limited to the ruling party—opposition actors also increase sovereignty discourse in response to licensing events.

This finding supports the argument that offshore licensing is perceived as a direct violation of sovereignty, as it permits external actors, such as international oil companies, to operate in disputed waters. These actions effectively alter the status quo and reinforce elite perceptions of territorial loss. Offshore licensing is thus seen not only as an economic activity but also as a political move that legitimizes rival claims through resource extraction. As a result, the perceived loss of sovereignty becomes a tangible and immediate threat that triggers military escalation to deter further changes to the territorial status quo. For in-

Table 1: Territorial Sovereignty Topic

	OLS		*Beta Regression*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Geological Survey	0.062	0.072	0.526	0.579
	(0.161)	(0.161)	(0.870)	(0.868)
Resource Discovery	−0.003	−0.001	−0.083	−0.077
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.066)	(0.066)
Offshore Licensing	0.090***	0.053**	0.536***	0.299**
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.099)	(0.123)
Maritime Delimitation	−0.026*	−0.031**	−0.128	−0.150*
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.081)	(0.081)
Gender	−0.023	−0.026	0.004	−0.018
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.117)	(0.117)
Party Position	0.085***	0.020	0.527***	0.099
	(0.025)	(0.035)	(0.065)	(0.160)
Election Year	−0.015	−0.017	−0.030	−0.048
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.097)	(0.097)
Licensing × Party Position		0.084**		0.512***
		(0.033)		(0.175)
Intercept	0.112***	0.143***	−1.921***	−1.702***
	(0.036)	(0.038)	(0.139)	(0.155)
Party Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	No
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	No
Observations	827	827	827	827
R^2	0.192	0.199	0.106	0.115
Adjusted R^2	0.153	0.159		
Log Likelihood			507.542	511.860
Residual Std. Error	0.161 (df = 788)	0.160 (df = 787)		
F Statistic	4.932*** (df = 38; 788)	5.008*** (df = 39; 787)		

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

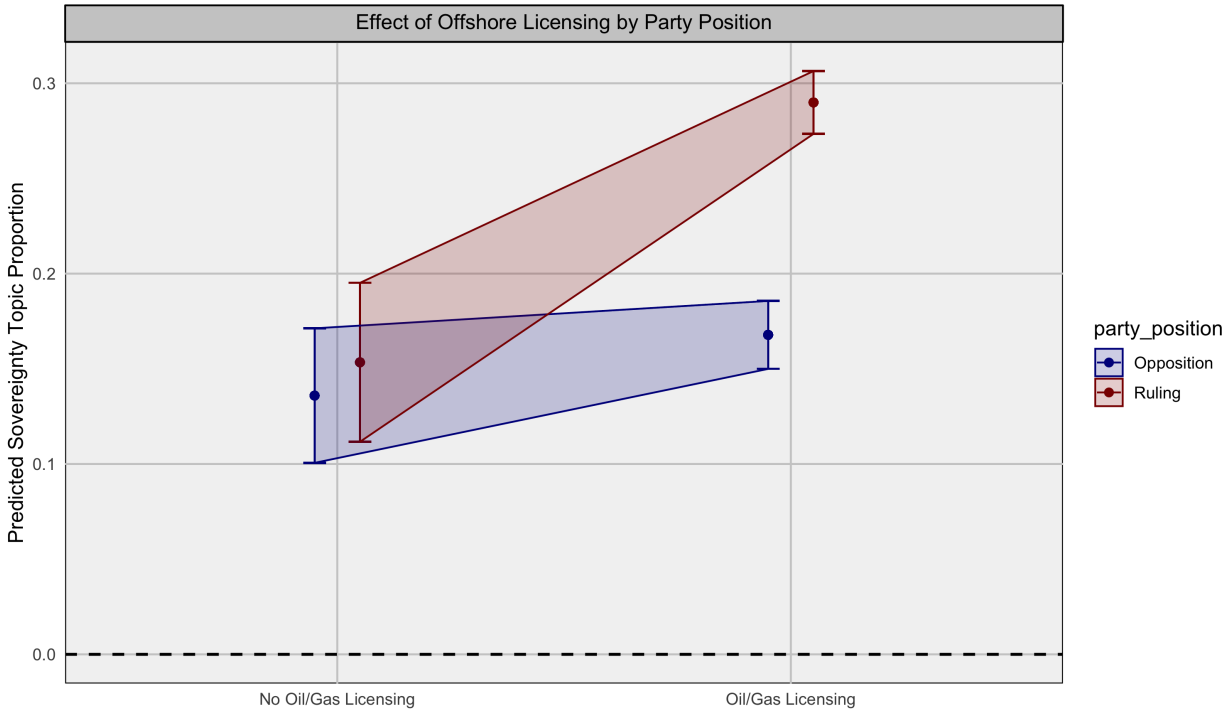

Figure 7: Effect of Offshore Licensing by Party Position

stance, Turkey deployed warships to block exploratory drilling by foreign companies licensed by Cyprus in contested maritime areas (İpek and Gür, 2022). Similarly, in the South China Sea, China has repeatedly deployed coast guard and naval vessels to confront drilling activities initiated by Vietnam and the Philippines in disputed waters following foreign licensing deals (Luo, 2023). In another case, Venezuela intercepted and detained two ExxonMobil exploration vessels operating under a Guyanese license in contested waters off the Essequibo coast, escalating an already tense maritime boundary dispute (Reuters, 2018).

Figure 7 further illustrates this dynamic, showing that sovereignty rhetoric intensifies among both government and opposition actors following offshore licensing events. This suggests that offshore licensing creates a shared perception of threat, where even opposition parties, despite their polarized political differences, perceive a threat to territorial sovereignty. This convergence may reflect the high political costs of appearing weak on sovereignty issues,

as opposition actors risk electoral backlash if they downplay the perceived loss of territorial control. Taken together, these results highlight that sovereignty discourse is not just a government-driven strategy but a reactive response to geopolitical actions that redefine the territorial status quo. Offshore licensing triggers bipartisan sovereignty anxiety because it represents an active encroachment on maritime sovereignty, making alignment across political actors a strategic necessity.

Table 2: Resources Topic

	OLS		*Beta Regression*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Geological Survey	−0.092	−0.075	−0.977	−0.878
	(0.139)	(0.139)	(1.009)	(1.010)
Resource Discovery	0.021*	0.019*	0.179**	0.162**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.071)	(0.071)
Offshore Licensing	−0.012	−0.012	−0.047	−0.034
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.103)	(0.103)
Maritime Delimitation	−0.008	−0.034*	−0.092	−0.243**
	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.087)	(0.112)
Gender	−0.0004	−0.004	−0.076	−0.094
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.125)	(0.125)
Party Position	−0.010	−0.025	0.048	−0.099
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.069)	(0.096)
Election Year	0.032**	0.035**	0.065	0.077
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.103)	(0.103)
Delimitation × Party Position		0.046**		0.299**
		(0.021)		(0.137)
Intercept	0.138***	0.145***	−2.095***	−2.024***
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.147)	(0.151)
Party Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	No
Observations	827	827	827	827
R^2	0.067	0.072	0.019	0.028
Adjusted R^2	0.022	0.026		
Log Likelihood			1,118.351	1,120.729
Residual Std. Error	0.139 (df = 788)	0.138 (df = 787)		
F Statistic	1.485** (df = 38; 788)	1.573** (df = 39; 787)		
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

The results in Table 2 indicate that resource discoveries significantly increase the salience

of resource-related topics in parliamentary discussions about territorial disputes, while other geopolitical events, such as offshore licensing and maritime delimitation agreements, do not exhibit statistically significant effects. Resource discoveries are positively associated with resource discourse at the $p < 0.1$ level in OLS models with party fixed effects (Models 1 and 2) and at the $p < 0.05$ level in Beta Regression models (Models 3 and 4), suggesting that when new energy reserves are identified, political actors place greater emphasis on resource issues. Additionally, while OLS estimates indicate an increase in resource-related discourse during election years, this effect is not statistically significant in Beta Regression models, suggesting that election cycles may only weakly influence parliamentary attention to resource issues, and this relationship is sensitive to model specification.

Second, maritime boundary agreements appear to decrease the proportion of resource-related discourse in parliamentary discussions, but this effect is less robust across model specifications. The negative and significant effect of delimitation agreements in Model 2 ($p < 0.1$) and Model 4 ($p < 0.05$) suggests that once territorial boundaries are formally established, political actors reduce their emphasis on resource control. This finding aligns with the expectation that the legal resolution of maritime boundaries reduces uncertainty over resource ownership, thereby making energy security concerns less politically salient.

Figure 8 further illustrates this pattern, revealing a divergence in response between the ruling and opposition parties. Maritime boundary agreements appear to reduce resource-related discourse among opposition actors, while the ruling party slightly increases its emphasis on resource issues. This suggests that the incumbent party may strategically highlight resource claims to reinforce the perception that delimitation agreements protect the country's energy interests. Alternatively, this divergence may reflect a credit-taking strategy by the government, where the ruling party emphasizes resource gains attributed to newly established maritime boundaries. For instance, following the Turkey-Libya maritime boundary agreement, the Turkish government frequently promoted newly announced exploration zones

within the delimited areas, framing them as a direct benefit of successful diplomatic negotiations. In contrast, opposition actors—lacking the same opportunity for credit-taking—may shift their focus to criticizing the government's broader diplomatic strategy or questioning the legitimacy of the agreements.

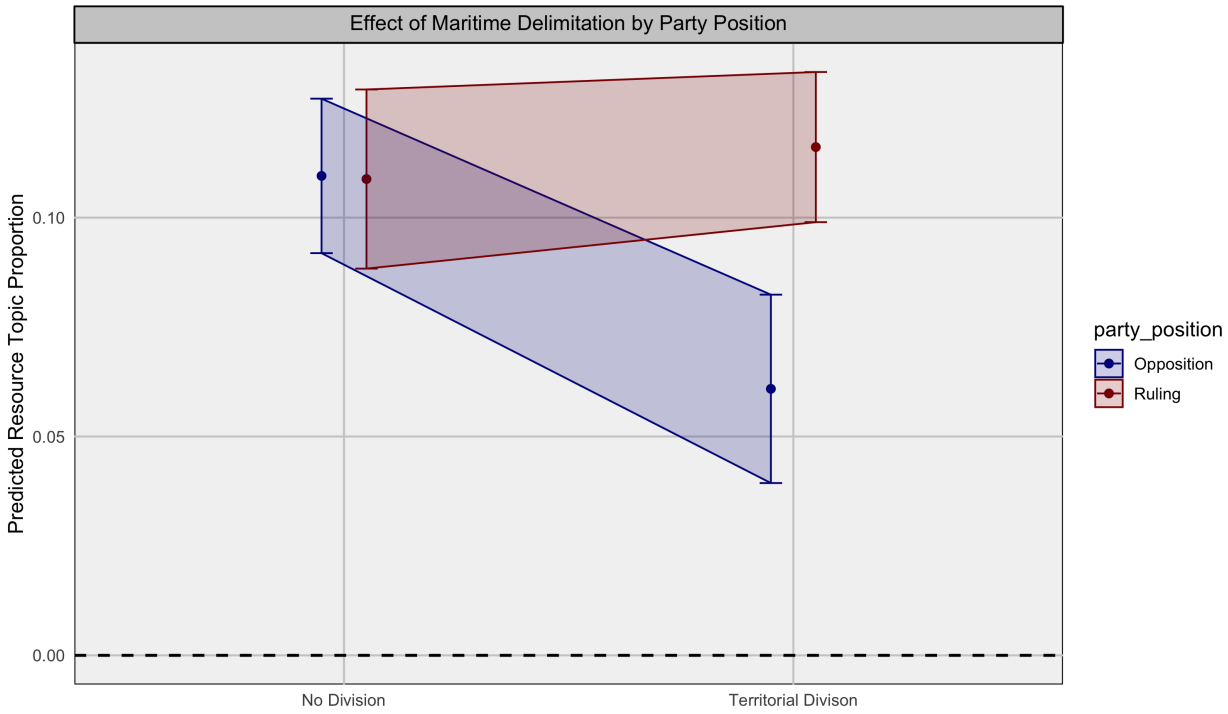

Figure 8: Effect of Maritime Delimitation Agreements by Party Position

These findings reveal a distinction between sovereignty and resource discourse in parliamentary debates on territorial disputes. Offshore licensing triggers bipartisan territorial sovereignty anxiety because it represents an active encroachment on contested waters, reinforcing perceptions of potential territorial losses. This drives both ruling and opposition parties to adopt nationalist rhetoric, aligning their positions to avoid electoral costs associated with appearing weak on sovereignty. In contrast, resource access anxiety increases in response to resource discoveries, rather than immediate geopolitical developments. While maritime delimitation agreements reduce uncertainty over resource ownership, leading to a

decline in resource-related discussions, the ruling party slightly increases its emphasis on resource topics. This likely reflects an effort to reinforce its narrative that Turkey's energy interests remain secure and to claim credit for successfully negotiating boundary agreements with other states. An analysis of parliamentary discussions following the 2019 Turkey-Libya maritime agreement confirms this pattern, with government officials emphasizing the expansion of Turkey's territorial claims and portraying the agreement as a diplomatic achievement. In contrast, opposition parties reduce their focus on resource topics after such agreements, potentially redirecting their criticism toward the government's broader diplomatic performance.

Lastly, I further examine domestic political dynamics over disputes over resource-rich territory using a transformer-based sentiment analysis model fine-tuned for the Turkish language. Specifically, I employ the savasy/bert-base-turkish-sentiment-cased model, a BERT-based architecture pretrained on a large Turkish corpus and fine-tuned on a diverse set of Turkish texts, including movie reviews, product reviews, and tweets (Yildirim and Asgari-Chenaghlu, 2021; Yildirim, 2024). Each speech is divided into overlapping 128-token chunks to ensure full text coverage within model limits, and sentiment scores are assigned to each chunk based on the model's confidence in classifying them as positive or negative. The final sentiment score for each speech is calculated as the average of these chunked scores and aggregated by year and party.

Figure 9 presents the average sentiment of parliamentary speeches over time, disaggregated by party position. The results indicate that resource-related territorial disputes generate moments of bipartisan convergence, particularly during periods of heightened geopolitical tensions. Both ruling and opposition parties exhibit sharp declines in sentiment when major offshore licensing rounds, boundary disputes, or military confrontations occur, reflecting a shared nationalist response to perceived sovereignty threats.

Notably, the ruling party's sentiment trajectory is more volatile, oscillating between as-

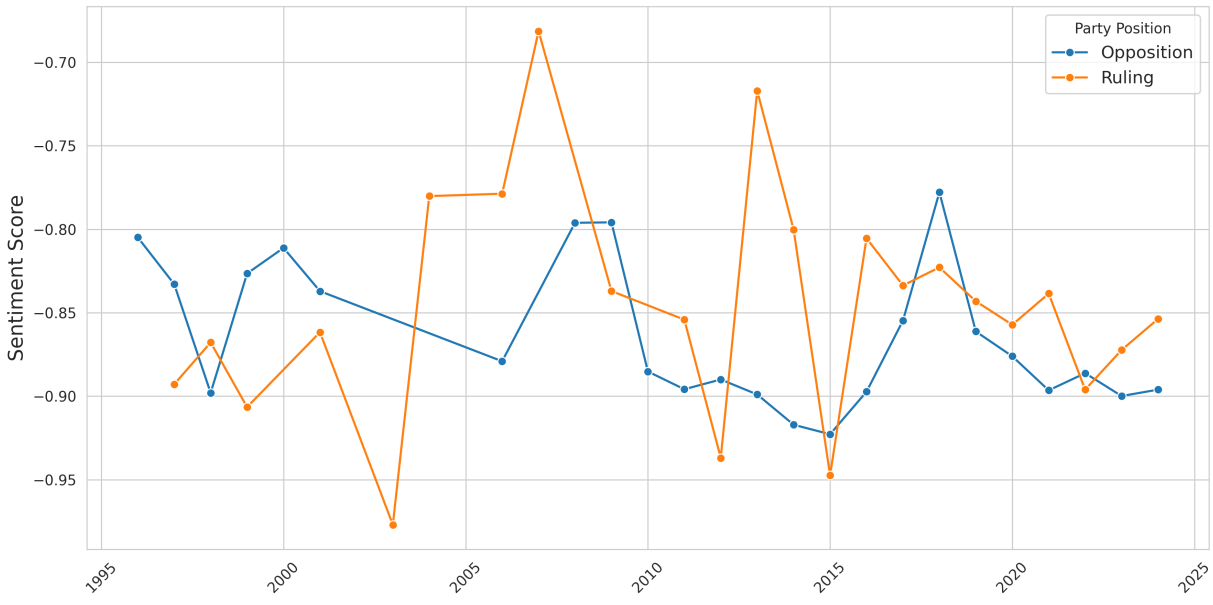

Figure 9: Sentiment Analysis by Party Position over Time

sertive rhetoric and diplomatic signaling depending on the geopolitical context. In contrast, the opposition maintains a consistently negative tone in later years, likely reflecting a reactive stance that emphasizes sovereignty concerns while critiquing the government's diplomatic performance. These findings further support the argument that territorial disputes over energy resources foster a strategic realignment in elite discourse. Sovereignty threats initially drive temporary alignment between government and opposition actors, but over time, the ruling party strategically adjusts its rhetoric, balancing between confrontation and diplomatic engagement. In contrast, the opposition sustains a more critical and consistently negative tone in its speeches.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined the sources of elite perceptions of territorial sovereignty and resource access in maritime disputes. My central argument posits that adversaries' unilateral geopolitical actions—specifically bilateral maritime boundary agreements, offshore licens-

ing activities, and discoveries of offshore resources—trigger domestic anxieties by altering the perceived territorial status quo. Utilizing novel parliamentary speech data from Turkey (1996–2024), my empirical analysis reveals that offshore licensing consistently increases concerns over territorial sovereignty among both government and opposition elites, and subsequent resource discoveries near disputed territories heighten anxieties about resource access. Maritime boundary agreements, on the other hand, did not exhibit a consistent direct impact but revealed subtle differences in responses between ruling and opposition parties, suggesting more nuanced domestic political dynamics following diplomatic settlements.

These findings have important implications for our broader understanding of territorial dispute escalation. First, my analysis underscores how the logic of loss aversion fundamentally shapes state behavior in disputes over resource-rich maritime territories. When adversaries' geopolitical actions create perceptions of potential territorial loss, states become more willing to pursue riskier, militarized responses to prevent or reverse these perceived losses. Indeed, anecdotal evidence presented throughout this article illustrates how states frequently deploy military force in maritime disputes to obstruct adversaries' offshore resource exploration and extraction activities.

Second, recent research by Lee (2024*a*,*b*) presents compelling geo-spatial and experimental evidence suggesting that states in the Western Hemisphere often refrain from claiming resource-rich territories due to domestic distributional conflicts. In contrast, my findings indicate that domestic opposition parties may align with the government when territorial sovereignty is explicitly threatened by external adversaries, prioritizing nationalist sentiments over distributional grievances. Alternatively, opposition actors may find it politically advantageous to criticize government policies as insufficiently protective of national interests. This bipartisan perception of potential territorial loss amplifies nationalist rhetoric, shrinking diplomatic space available for territorial compromise by raising the domestic political costs associated with concessions. Thus, adversarial geopolitical actions inadvertently foster

internal political dynamics that increase the likelihood of militarized outcomes.

This discrepancy between findings points to important avenues for future research. Future studies should investigate conditions under which states unite around territorial sovereignty and resource access domestically or experience internal division driven by concerns about uneven distributional benefits of resource acquisition. Examining how regime type, adversary characteristics, and domestic institutional contexts (e.g., corruption levels or transparency in resource management) moderate elite responses can clarify when resource-rich territories generate internal consensus versus contention. Such research would deepen our understanding of how domestic politics influence states' decisions to escalate territorial disputes.

Finally, these findings carry important implications for international policy and the investment strategies of foreign firms. Policymakers and multinational energy companies must recognize that announcements of offshore licensing or bilateral boundary agreements, though often intended to reduce uncertainty or foster economic cooperation, can lead to the bipartisan perception of territorial sovereignty loss and trigger military backlash from other disputant states. These dynamics could lead to military escalation that limits the space for diplomatic resolution and creates geopolitical risks for foreign companies operating near disputed maritime territory.

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A Appendix

Contents

A.1 KeyATM Model Convergence

Figure A.1 displays the evolution of alpha values over iterations across different latent states. The stabilization of values over time indicates that the model has converged, ensuring the robustness of topic estimates.

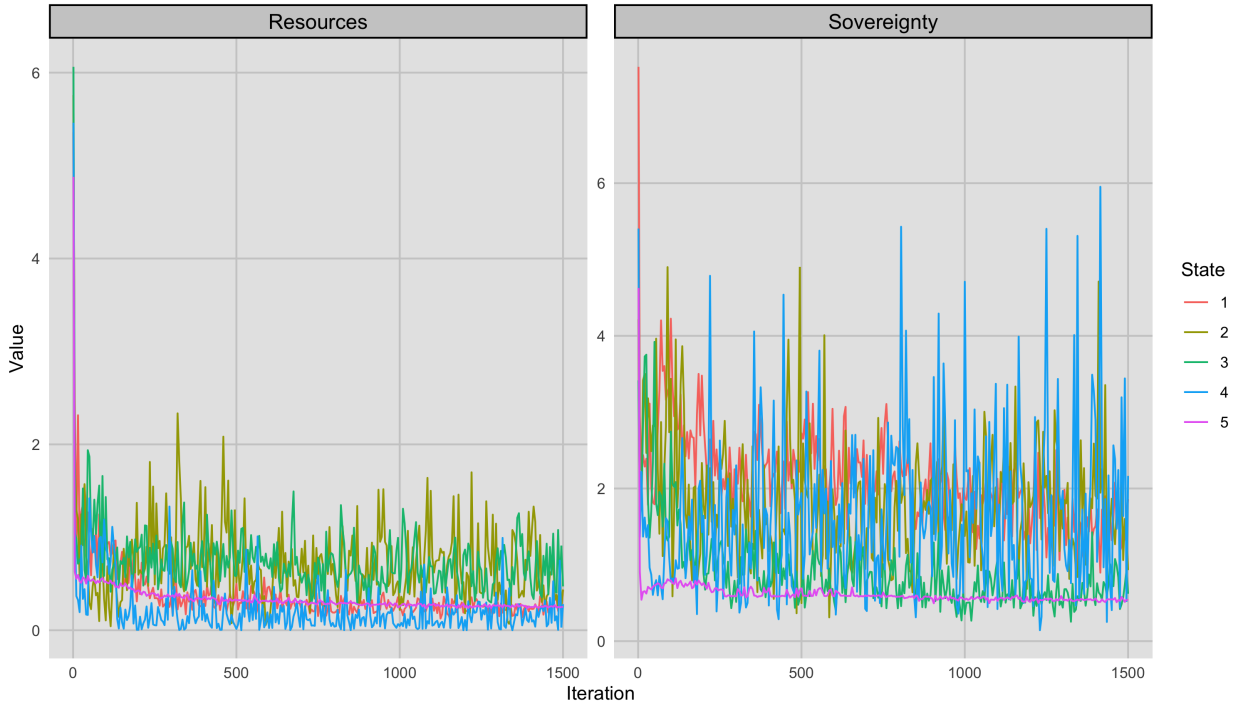

Figure A.1: Convergence Diagnostics of the Dynamic keyATM Model

A.2 Summary Statistics of Key Variables

Table A.1: Summary statistics for key variables

Variable	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
discovery	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.4667	1.0000	1.0000
offshorelicensing	0.0000	1.0000	1.0000	0.8319	1.0000	1.0000
electionyear	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.1644	0.0000	1.0000
numbermids	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000	0.7582	1.0000	2.0000
party_position	0.0000	0.0000	1.0000	0.5187	1.0000	1.0000
geosurvey	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.001209	0.0000	1.0000
delimit	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.4982	1.0000	1.0000
gender	0.0000	1.0000	1.0000	0.9226	1.0000	1.0000

A.3 Validation: Text-Netwrok Analysis

Here, I constructed a word-similarity network to verify that FastText embeddings capture meaningful semantic relationships among key terms. After generating vector representations for each Turkish term, I computed pairwise cosine similarities and retained only edges above a 0.6 threshold to highlight the strongest connections. To aid readability, node labels are automatically translated into English via the Google Translate API. Figure A.2 displays this network, allowing readers to inspect clusters of closely related concepts and corroborating the results presented in the main text.

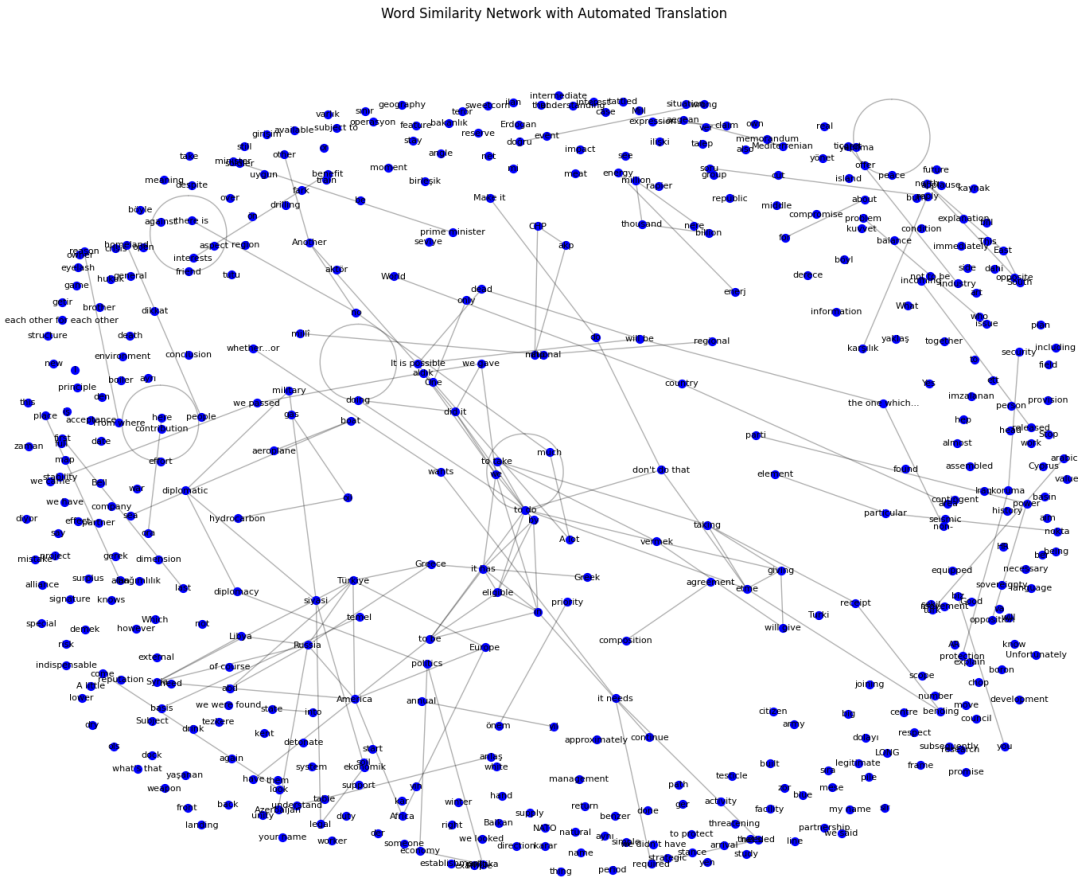

Figure A.2: Word Similarity Network for Parliamentary Speech Data

A.4 Robustness Check: Using one-year Laged IVs

Table A.2: Sovereignty Regression Results (1-Year Lag)

	OLS		*Beta Regression*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Geological Survey	0.148	0.119	1.099	0.898
	(0.161)	(0.161)	(0.870)	(0.871)
Resource Discovery (lag 1)	-0.035^{**}	-0.032^{**}	-0.256^{***}	-0.252^{***}
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.080)	(0.080)
Offshore Licensing (lag 1)	0.102^{***}	0.069^{***}	0.624^{***}	0.390^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.101)	(0.128)
Maritime Delimitation (lag 1)	0.027	0.022	0.158	0.144
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.107)	(0.107)
Gender	−0.019	−0.022	0.023	0.004
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.117)	(0.117)
Party Position	0.067^{***}	0.012	0.514^{***}	0.106
	(0.026)	(0.036)	(0.064)	(0.161)
Election Year	0.014	0.012	0.133	0.121
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.104)	(0.104)
Number of MIDs	-0.040^{***}	-0.039^{***}	-0.219^{***}	-0.220^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.059)	(0.059)
Offshore Licensing (lag 1)×Party Position		0.073^{**}		0.486^{***}
		(0.033)		(0.176)
Intercept	0.128^{***}	0.154^{***}	-1.936^{***}	-1.722^{***}
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.139)	(0.157)
Party Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	No
Observations	821	821	821	821
R^2	0.205	0.210	0.118	0.124
Adjusted R^2	0.170	0.174		
Log Likelihood			509.951	513.792
Residual Std. Error	0.159 (df=785)	0.159 (df=784)		
F Statistic	5.787^{***} (df=35;785)	5.790^{***} (df=36;784)		

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.3: Resource Topic Regression Results (1-Year Lag)

	OLS		*Beta Regression*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Number of MIDs	−0.001	−0.003	0.159**	0.148**
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.063)	(0.064)
Geological Survey	−0.109	−0.118	−1.194	−1.233
	(0.140)	(0.140)	(1.013)	(1.013)
Resource Discovery (lag 1)	0.016	0.014	0.281***	0.257***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.085)	(0.086)
Offshore Licensing (lag 1)	−0.012	−0.012	−0.120	−0.107
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.106)	(0.106)
Maritime Delimitation (lag 1)	−0.005	−0.032	−0.257**	−0.392***
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.113)	(0.129)
Gender	−0.001	−0.004	−0.116	−0.130
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.125)	(0.125)
Party Position	−0.014	−0.032	0.065	−0.079
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.069)	(0.097)
Election Year	0.034**	0.037**	−0.018	−0.0003
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.110)	(0.110)
Maritime Delimitation (lag 1)×Party Position		0.052**		0.290**
		(0.021)		(0.138)
Intercept	0.144***	0.152***	−2.079***	−2.007***
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.147)	(0.151)
Party Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	No
Observations	821	821	821	821
R^2	0.063	0.071	0.026	0.034
Adjusted R^2	0.022	0.028		
Log Likelihood			1,113.759	1,115.984
Residual Std. Error	0.139 (df=785)	0.139 (df=784)		
F Statistic	1.521** (df=35;785)	1.656*** (df=36;784)		

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

B Supplementary Written Opposition Inquiry Data on Territorial Disputes

B.1 Word-Emdeddings

I compiled a supplementary corpus of 95 (in total) written inquiries from opposition deputies and their corresponding government replies. Applying the same preprocessing and FastText-based clustering (k = 4) in the main analysis, Figure B.1 shows the most frequent terms colored by cluster. The dominant cluster contains resource-related vocabulary (e.g., "gas," "drilling," "license"), indicating that these topics permeate both questions and answers.

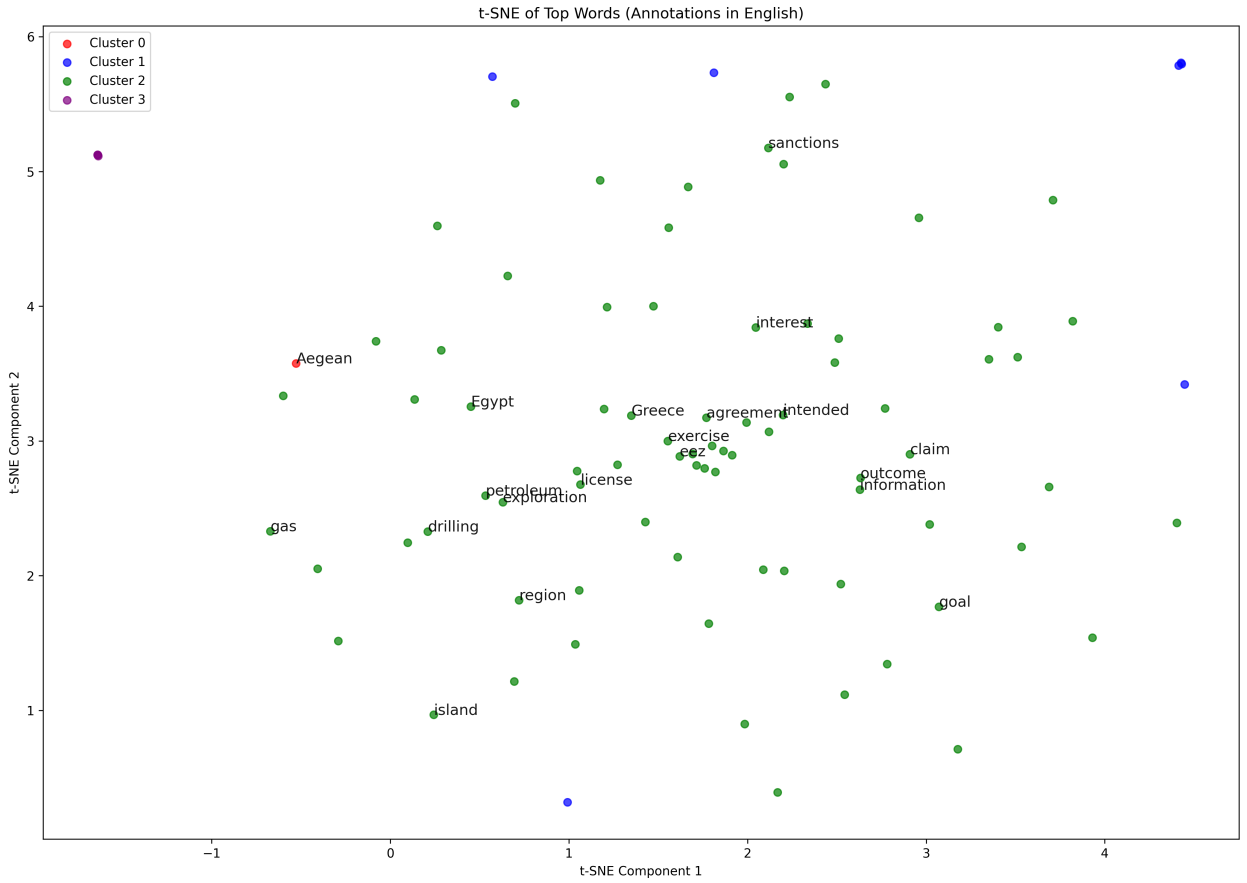

Figure B.1: K-Means Clustering of Top Words in Written Submissions and Answers

Second, Figure B.2 presents document-level embeddings—each obtained by averaging FastText vectors for a single inquiry or response—and projects them into two dimensions via t-SNE. Opposition questions (red) form a tight cluster, reflecting consistent, information-seeking themes, while government answers (blue) are more dispersed, illustrating a broader diversity of framing and rhetorical strategies.

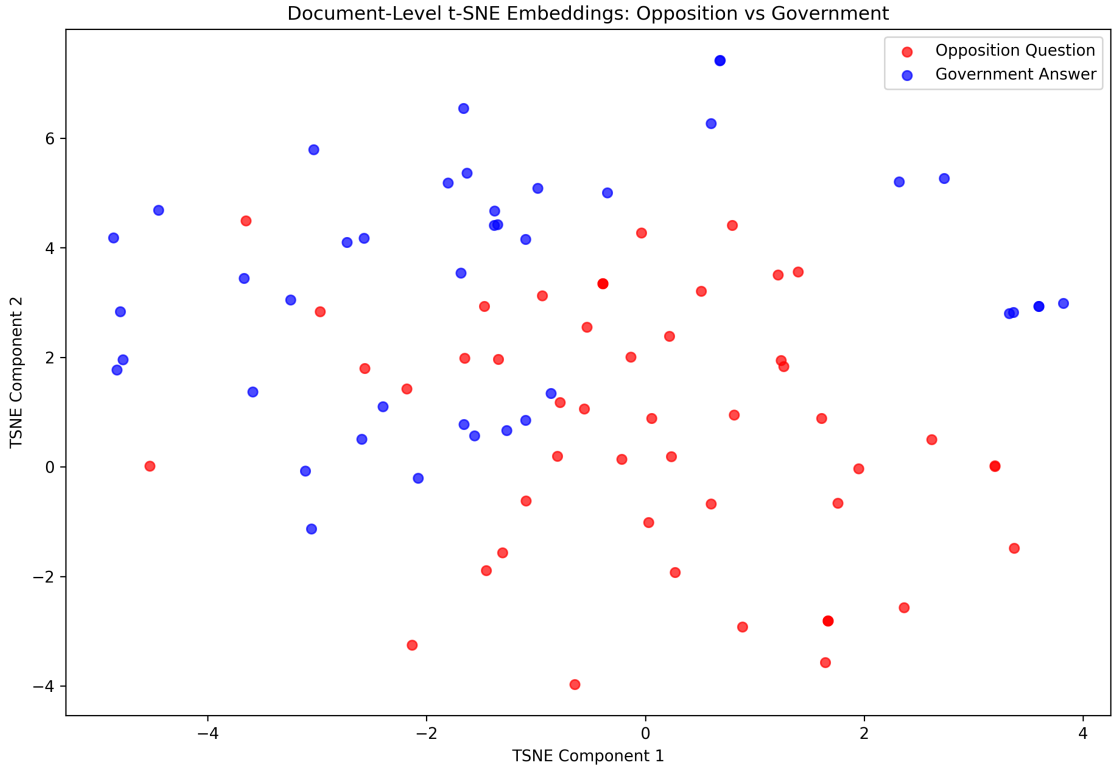

Figure B.2: Document-Level Embeddings of Opposition Inquiries and Government Answers

B.2 LLM Classification into Resource Access and Sovereignty Defense

I used the XLM-RoBERTa large language model for zero-shot classification of the supplementary corpus into 'Resource Access' and 'Sovereignty Defense' categories. XLM-RoBERTa is a multilingual transformer-based model pre-trained on a very large corpus of Common Crawl data (Conneau et al., 2020). While the base model is trained over 100 languages, the fine-tuned version is tailored for fifteen languages, including Turkish. I divided the each input text into overlapping 512-token chunks to fit the model's token limit, and each chunk was classified into one of two categories. The final label for each text was assigned based on the highest predicted probability. Figure B.3 shows the distribution of classified speeches over time by opposition inquiries and government answers, and B.4 displays the yearly counts of offshore licensing, resource discovery, maritime boundary agreement, and militarized interstate disputes.

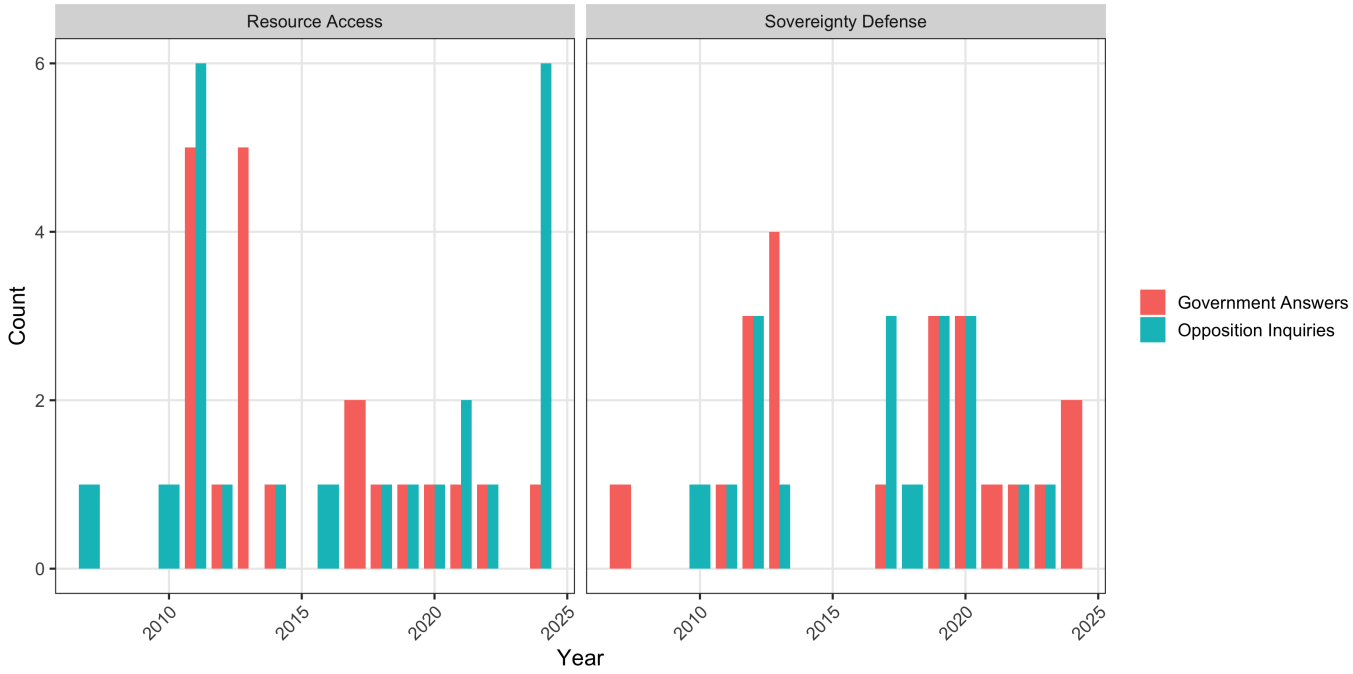

Figure B.3: LLM Classification into Resource Access and Sovereignty Defense

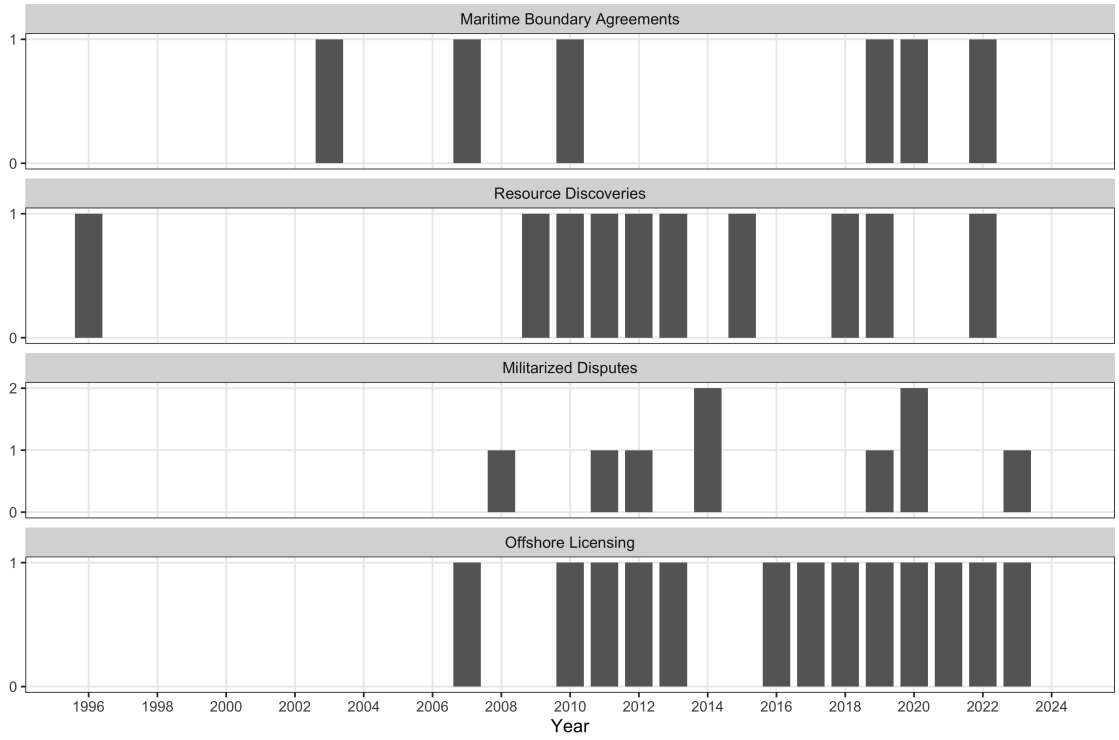

Figure B.4: Time Trend for Offshore Licensing, Maritime Boundary Agreements, Resource Discoveries and MIDs

These figures provide further confidence in my main analysis. First, the opposition submitted its first formal inquiry in 2007, following the Cyprus-Lebanon maritime boundary agreement and the subsequent announcement of 11 offshore exploration blocks by Cyprus. In response, the Turkish Navy escorted out the licensed foreign energy exploration firm while conducting exploratory surveys around Turkish-claimed maritime areas.

Second, the first notable surge in Resource Access occurred during the 2010–2013 period, following the United States Geological Survey's (USGS) assessment of Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon potential in 2010. This period also saw several offshore licensing rounds by both Cyprus and Turkey, initiated after a maritime boundary agreement between Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Multiple countries, including Cyprus and Israel, discovered substantial offshore natural gas reserves during this period. Notably, the Sovereignty Defense theme also experienced its first significant spike in this period, reflecting

rising concerns over territorial integrity as energy exploration intensified.

Finally, a second surge in Sovereignty Defense discourse emerged around 2019–2020, coinciding with Turkey's signing of a maritime boundary agreement with Libya's Government of National Accord and its subsequent NAVTEX announcements for exploratory drilling in contested areas claimed by Greece. In response, Greece announced mobilization, threatened to use force, and deployed naval vessels to Turkish exploration sites. Turkish-licensed energy vessels were escorted by the Turkish Navy, and during naval maneuvers, two warships collided. Turkey eventually recalled its exploration vessels, a decision criticized by the opposition. This episode further illustrates that the opposition adopts a hawkish stance over resource-rich areas when they plausibly perceive political benefits.

Moreover, in 2023, just before the presidential election, the opposition alliance declared in their common policy memorandum of understanding that they would uphold Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean policies to protect the country's sovereign rights. Table B.1 presents English-translated statements from the Opposition Alliance's Common Policies Memorandum related to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, published before the 2023 presidential elections in Turkey.

	Statements
1	We will protect our rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, complete international agreements on exclusive economic zones, and intensify exploration activities.
2	We will prevent Turkey's isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean, prioritize achieving results through multilateral negotiation processes for delimiting maritime zones and ensuring the fair sharing of hydrocarbon resources.
3	The Aegean Sea should be considered an area of peace, cooperation, and good neighborliness. We will work towards this goal and will not allow any development that could harm our sovereign areas in the Aegean Sea.
4	We will effectively utilize the opportunity for our country to be the sole alternative for transporting Eastern Mediterranean natural gas to Europe.
5	We will establish a trade hub for petroleum and petroleum products in the Mediterranean region, develop port infrastructure for petroleum trade, and increase the number and capacity of pipelines transporting oil from neighboring countries to the region.

Table B.1: (2023) Statements on Eastern Mediterranean from Turkey's Opposition Alliance Common Policies Memorandum

This further demonstrates how resource-rich maritime zones have become a bipartisan issue, with both the government and the opposition recognizing the strategic importance of maintaining Turkey's territorial sovereignty and resource access in the region. Overall, the analysis of supplementary data enhances confidence in the findings presented in the main text and provides additional micro-level evidence on the domestic politics of territorial disputes over resource-rich maritime areas.