CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS/FULL PAPERS
ISBN: 978-625-97566-9-1/July 2025

"41st RSEP International Multidisciplinary Conference" 1-2 July 2025, Double Tree by Hilton Pudong", Shanghai, China"

Two leaders, two visions: A discourse analysis from the transformational and transactional leadership perspectives of Putin and Erdoğan

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.19275/RSEPCONFERENCES358

Abstract

In contemporary global politics, numerous leaders hold significant influence on both a global and regional scale. These leaders are important figures who shape national and international policies, affect global economic relations, and set the agenda for societies. However, among those leaders who have been in power for an extended period and have directed both global and regional politics, especially Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stand out. These leaders have the capacity to influence not only the political, economic, and social dynamics in their own countries but also those around the world. Putin has held the presidency in Russia since 2000, consolidating his political power over the years and making significant changes in the country's domestic and foreign policies. Erdoğan has been at the helm of Türkiye since 2003, shaping the political landscape through the continued rule of the AK Party. This long tenure has enabled both leaders to establish strong political structures in their countries, leave lasting impacts on their societies, and play decisive roles in global politics. Furthermore, both leaders remain influential global actors, making decisions that shape regional and global developments. Therefore, Putin and Erdoğan's leadership styles, political ideologies, and global interactions emerge as a subject that requires extensive analysis.

Both leaders have effectively used media tools to legitimize their policies and gain public support. In this regard, media discourse forms the core elements of their transformational and transactional visions. In this context, the leaders' discourse and practices in various areas are crucial for understanding their transformative visions. The research aims to analyze the discourse of these leaders in foreign policy, domestic policy, defense industry, and the economy, examining their global and regional impacts in depth. In line with this, the study involves discourse analysis by reviewing statements published by major news agencies which have resonated widely in the international press.

Keywords: Erdoğan, Putin, Türkiye, Russia, Leadership Styles, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership
Jel codes: F52, F63

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1. Introduction

Since 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has become one of the most influential figures in the Turkish executive branch, having served consecutively as Prime Minister and President. His leadership has been central to the sustained political dominance of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which he co-founded. Beyond the duration of his tenure, Erdoğan has distinguished himself through his ability to set the political agenda, exert influence over state institutions, and initiate systemic transformations, positioning him as one of the most consequential leaders in the history of the Turkish Republic.

Similarly, Vladimir Putin has held the positions of President and Prime Minister of the Russian Federation since 2000, maintaining consolidated control over the executive authority. His leadership emerged in response to the political and institutional instability that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and has since been closely associated with the "strong state" paradigm. Understanding Putin's leadership is not only vital for interpreting Russian domestic and foreign policy trajectories but also offers broader insights into contemporary trends in authoritarianism, populist leadership, and geopolitical power reconfigurations.

In this context, the theoretical frameworks developed by James MacGregor Burns (1978), who conceptualized leadership as a moral and transformational process, and Bernard M. Bass (1985), who empirically distinguished between transformational and transactional leadership styles, provide a robust foundation for the analysis of Erdoğan's and Putin's political practices. The extended duration of both leaders' rule allows for a nuanced examination of how transformational and transactional leadership styles may converge, evolve, and at times coexist or conflict in response to shifting political, social, and institutional contexts.

This study aims to analyze the political discourses of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin in four key domains—domestic politics, foreign policy, defense industry, and the economy—through the conceptual lens of transformational and transactional leadership theories.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory, developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), emphasizes the leader's ability to create a profound impact on followers by not only guiding them toward existing goals but also motivating them around a higher-order value system. This leadership approach is characterized by five key dimensions: vision, charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Visionary leaders articulate idealistic future goals that transcend the current state and mobilize followers to work collectively toward those ideals (Allix, 2000). Charismatic traits help build trust, while inspirational communication strengthens collective identity and a sense of belonging. Intellectual stimulation encourages followers to critically engage with existing paradigms and foster innovative thinking (Allix, 2000). Individualized consideration entails a leader's sensitivity to each follower's needs, values, and potential (Turner & Barling, 2002). By integrating these attributes, transformational leaders can initiate deep organizational or political change and sustain long-term reforms.

2.2. Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership, by contrast, prioritizes the maintenance and efficiency of existing organizational or political systems. In this model, leaders engage with followers based on clearly defined roles, expectations, and outcomes. The interaction is largely structured around a reward–punishment mechanism (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Leaders offer material or symbolic rewards for meeting expectations and impose sanctions or disciplinary measures for non-compliance (Stone et al., 2004). Motivation in transactional leadership stems primarily from extrinsic incentives, and the leader–follower relationship is maintained on the basis of mutual benefit. This leadership style is particularly prevalent in bureaucratic institutions, military hierarchies, and technical organizations (Den Hartog et al., 1997). As noted by Bass and Avolio (1994), transactional leaders are inclined to preserve the status quo and rely on procedural responses during periods of crisis. Therefore, the primary goal of transactional leadership is not transformation but the maintenance of order and operational continuity.

3. Methodology

This study conducts an in-depth analysis of the political discourses of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin, focusing on four strategic domains: domestic politics, foreign policy, the defense industry, and the economy. The central aim is to explore how leadership styles are constructed and reflected through public statements in these areas.

A qualitative research design is employed, specifically using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis centers on examining both written and spoken language and explores how power, ideology, and political

meanings are constructed and transformed within particular discursive contexts (Çelik & Ekşi, 2008). The analysis begins with the articulation of the research problem and then proceeds to data collection via the compilation of relevant textual materials. These materials may include public speeches, interviews, and official statements by the selected political figures. As Oğuz (2008) notes, discourse analysts prioritize the micro-level of discourse passages rather than generalized conclusions. Therefore, discourse samples are drawn from unaltered, authentic, and naturally occurring data, ensuring minimal distortion of their original context. In CDA, the emphasis is not on sample size, but on the ability of the data to address the research questions. The analytical process involves stages of reading/classification, interpretation, and structuring (Çelik & Ekşi, 2008).

Hypotheses

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- **H1**: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his domestic policy discourse.
- **H2**: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his foreign policy discourse.
- **H3**: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his defense industry discourse.
- **H4**: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his economic discourse.
- **H5**: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his domestic policy discourse.
- **H6**: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his foreign policy discourse.
- **H7**: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his defense industry discourse.
- **H8**: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his economic discourse.

4. Findings

4.1. Leadership Styles in Domestic Political Discourse

Following Boris Yeltsin's resignation in 1999, Vladimir Putin was appointed President of the Russian Federation and officially assumed office through the 2000 elections. His statement, *"A strong state is indispensable for the security and development of its citizens"* (Putin, 2000), emphasized public demand for security while projecting a leadership model aimed at reconstructing collective identity. Putin's early post-2000 discourse focused on themes such as "stability" and "state reconstruction," reflecting the charismatic vision dimension of transformational leadership. These statements functioned not only as political rhetoric but also as the ideological foundation for crafting a renewed sense of national identity.

In the aftermath of the 2002 "Nord-Ost theatre hostage crisis," Putin stated, *"We overcame this terrible tragedy at the cost of many lives. Without the courage and endurance of the hostages, our losses would have been even greater"* (Putin, 2002). This expression, underscoring resilience and collective sacrifice, exemplifies transformational leadership by reinforcing national unity and collective perseverance. In 2003, the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky—an oligarch openly critical of Putin—signaled the president's intention to curb the influence of wealthy elites in strategic sectors and eliminate dissent (NPR.org, 2022).

Amid fears of disintegration following the Chechen wars, the strengthening of centralized authority was framed not merely as a security measure but as part of a narrative grounded in national memory and historical continuity. The concept of *"vertical power"* (Putin's term during his rise to the presidency) laid the institutional blueprint for this vision. During this period, the state was reconstructed not merely as a provider of public order but also as an ideological apparatus for societal cohesion. Putin's perception as a visionary leader was reinforced not only through discourse but also through administrative reforms, federal centralization, and the reconfiguration of state-business relations (Sakwa, 2010). Thus, evidence from this period indicates the presence of transformational leadership traits in Putin's domestic leadership practices.

Similarly, some of Erdoğan's domestic political discourse exhibits transformational characteristics by motivating followers toward higher values and collective ideals. For instance, the statement, *"We have always competed with ourselves, continuously raising the bar"* (TRT Haber, 2025), is a clear manifestation of visionary and motivational leadership. Such rhetoric not only appeals to followers' rational interests but also activates emotional attachment and a strong sense of belonging (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Another statement, *"Those without a cause bound to their nation are doomed to failure"* (TRT Haber, 2020), exemplifies a narrative that fuses individual purpose with national values, thereby redefining civic consciousness and reinforcing the symbolic power of the leader. Moreover, Erdoğan's remark, *"In the old Turkey, others manipulated those in power; we put an end to that"* (TRT Haber, 2025), signals a deliberate rupture from the

past and a claim to systemic transformation—hallmarks of the reformist strand within transformational leadership. This discourse not only critiques the past but also assigns followers a historical role and responsibility.

Conversely, practices such as the suppression of political opposition, systematic control over the media, and constraints on electoral competition in Russia reflect classic transactional leadership. In response to the 2004 Beslan school siege, Putin stated, *"It is inevitable that our federal system be restructured to meet our security needs"* (BBC News, 2004). This led to significant changes, including the appointment of regional governors by the Kremlin, illustrating the use of centralized authority and control mechanisms. These reforms were implemented through a reward–punishment framework (Laqueur, 2015). The appointment of regional leaders based on loyalty to the Kremlin exemplifies how hierarchical obedience has become central to political legitimacy in Russia. Additionally, state-controlled media outlets, especially television networks and online platforms, have been instrumentalized to propagate government narratives while marginalizing independent journalism.

To maintain popular support, transactional strategies have also included economic incentives such as pension increases, direct cash transfers, infrastructure projects, and nationalistic rhetoric centered around public holidays (Politkovskaya, 2004). These mechanisms demonstrate how Putin has consolidated power not only through coercive institutions but also via the production of public consent (Gel'man, 2015). Accordingly, the evidence suggests that Putin's leadership exhibits a pronounced tendency toward transactional leadership, particularly in maintaining systemic stability and political control.

Likewise, certain aspects of Erdoğan's leadership align with transactional paradigms, especially in contexts involving crisis management, national security, and institutional authority. His statement, *"The events of October 6–8 constitute an attempted terrorist uprising"* (TRT Haber, 2024), reflects a decisive and interventionist stance in response to internal threats—an archetypal example of transactional leadership focused on order maintenance. Similarly, Erdoğan's criticism of the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), *"TÜSİAD has overstepped its bounds"* (TRT Haber, 2025), illustrates a punitive rhetoric aimed at disciplining economic actors and reaffirming executive authority.

Additionally, the technocratic nature of statements like *"We have decided to maintain the current policy in our cities for a while longer"* (TRT Haber, 2021), during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the managerial and stabilizing function of transactional leadership. Such discourse emphasizes the preservation of order and continuity rather than transformation.

In conclusion, an analysis of the domestic political rhetoric of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin reveals that both leaders strategically deploy elements of both transformational and transactional leadership, with context-specific variations. Putin's leadership is predominantly transactional in areas related to security, centralization, and political oversight, employing mechanisms of control, loyalty, and state-dominated media to ensure regime stability. However, transformational traits also emerge in moments emphasizing national identity and state restoration. Erdoğan, by contrast, exhibits transactional tendencies in crisis response and institutional regulation, yet his emphasis on national unity, visionary leadership, and collective transformation aligns more strongly with transformational leadership. Both leaders blend ideological narratives with strategic tools to consolidate public support through both emotional resonance and functional governance.

Therefore, the hypothesis "H1: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his domestic policy discourse" and the hypothesis "H5: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his domestic policy discourse" have been rejected.

4.2. Foreign Policy Discourse and Leadership Styles

Erdoğan's foreign policy vision reflects a hybrid leadership approach that integrates elements of transformational leadership—challenging the structural deficiencies of the international system and proposing normative alternatives—with transactional leadership, aimed at safeguarding national interests and reinforcing the status quo.

Statements such as:

- *"Considering the recent global developments, a historic window of opportunity has opened before Turkey. We are very close to achieving our rightful position in the global order"* (TRT Haber, 2025),
- *"Turkey continues to break taboos in foreign policy and write a new success story in line with its historical legacy"* (Anadolu Agency, 2025), and

- *"Before wars surround us further, before more innocent blood is spilled, and before more societies suffer, the structure of the UN Security Council—failing to maintain global peace—must be fundamentally reformed. Humanity expects this of us. In this regard, we continue to say, 'The world is bigger than five' and act with the belief that 'A fairer world is possible'"* (TRT Haber, 2024) —demonstrate a normative, idealistic, and inspirational tone that aligns closely with transformational leadership. These declarations frame Turkey not only as a regional power but as a responsible global actor advocating for a just and inclusive international order. Erdoğan's critique of the UN Security Council, particularly the call for structural reform, epitomizes a transformational stance challenging the legitimacy of the current global system.

Similarly, expressions such as *"The Turkish nation once again proves that it is willing to stand against the whole world for its independence and future"* (TRT Haber, 2019), aim to instill national pride, resilience, and collective confidence—hallmarks of the *inspirational motivation* dimension of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Moreover, following the 2016 coup attempt, Turkish foreign policy under Erdoğan shifted toward a more assertive, security-focused, and strategically autonomous trajectory, characterized by a pragmatic and transactional engagement with international actors (Haugom, 2019).

In contrast, Putin's foreign policy discourse—particularly his landmark address at the 2007 Munich Security Conference—reflects a transformational reassertion of Russia as a major power. His statement:

- *"A unipolar world is not only unacceptable but also incompatible with the contemporary global reality"* (Putin, 2007)

signaled a direct challenge to Western hegemony and presented a multipolar vision of global order. By criticizing NATO expansion and articulating Russia's "historic mission," Putin adopted a symbolic leadership role, reinforcing a sense of national destiny.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea further embodied this vision. His assertion that *"Crimea is the soul of Russia"* (Putin, 2014) represents a pivotal transformational moment in constructing a renewed Russian identity. Through concepts such as the "Russian World," which emphasize historical and cultural bonds, Putin sought to unify the populace around a national ideal. Alongside Eurasianist rhetoric, this ideological framing positions Russia as an alternative civilizational model to the liberal West—traditional, authoritarian, yet stable—central to his transformational leadership narrative (Lo, 2015).

Conversely, Erdoğan's foreign policy discourse also contains distinct transactional elements, particularly in statements that emphasize strategic gains and pragmatic cooperation, such as:

- *"Turkey will serve as an ideal host for potential negotiations between Russia, Ukraine, and the United States"* (TRT Haber, 2025),
- *"We are determined to open a new chapter with the United States, in line with our long-standing alliance"* (TRT Haber, 2019),
- *"Through the political declaration signed with Hungarian Prime Minister Orban, we elevated our strategic partnership to an enhanced level"* (TRT Haber, 2023),
- *"If necessary, we can engage in talks with the Taliban. There is a reality here, and if a door is knocked on, we will open it and hold our discussions"* (TRT Haber, 2021), and
- *"The people of Egypt are not at odds with us"* (TRT Haber, 2021).

These expressions demonstrate a leader articulating achievable goals, outlining pathways to success, and engaging in diplomacy grounded in mutual benefit—core characteristics of transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). Erdoğan's flexible, interest-based approach in dealing with diverse international actors further illustrates this point. His willingness to engage with the Taliban, for instance, reflects a realistic, results-oriented pragmatism aligned with the flexible, process-focused structure of transactional leadership.

Likewise, Putin's energy diplomacy, particularly agreements involving natural gas and oil, exemplifies transactional leadership in foreign policy (Hill & Gaddy, 2013). Russia's strategic energy partnerships—notably with China—demonstrate a reward-based diplomacy aimed at maximizing national interests through reciprocal cooperation. Energy resources function not only as economic assets but as tools of diplomatic leverage. In negotiations with European states, natural gas supply is often used as a bargaining instrument, while long-term energy deals with emerging powers in the Asia-Pacific, such as India and China, serve to establish geopolitical and economic interdependence (Stent, 2019).

Taken together, the foreign policy discourses of both Erdoğan and Putin exhibit a multi-layered leadership style that combines transformational and transactional elements. Erdoğan articulates a transformative vision grounded in global justice and multilateralism while simultaneously employing transactional methods to navigate complex diplomatic realities. Putin, on the other hand, leverages symbolic narratives of history, identity, and power to advance a transformational image, while implementing transactional strategies through energy diplomacy and realpolitik.

Thus, both leaders' foreign policy strategies align with a hybrid leadership model, where the interplay of transformational ideals and transactional practices enables them to maintain strategic flexibility while consolidating influence in the international arena.

Therefore, the hypothesis "H2: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his foreign policy discourse" and the hypothesis "H6: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his foreign policy discourse" have been rejected.

4.3. Defense Industry Discourses and Leadership Styles

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rhetoric on the defense industry can be interpreted as part of a multi-layered leadership strategy aimed at communicating Turkey's technological, military, and strategic capacities to the public. Statements such as:

- *"We will further enlarge our aircraft carrier and increase our power at sea. The grandchildren of Barbaros will show their strength to Barbaros himself"* (TRT Haber, 2023),
- *"In the past 19 years, Turkey has achieved a true revolution in the defense industry, just as in many other fields"* (TRT Haber, 2021),
- *"Our country is now among the ten nations capable of designing, constructing, and maintaining its own warships"* (TRT Haber, 2024), and
- *"Now we will build one twice the size of TCG Anadolu"* (TRT Haber, 2023), exemplify transformational leadership by emphasizing the mobilization of society around shared goals and higher ideals. These declarations not only highlight technological advancement but also serve as symbolic tools of emotional engagement through historical references and collective national pride. The invocation of *"Barbaros"* represents the fusion of historical continuity and modern military capacity, embodying the transformational dimensions of *inspirational motivation* and *idealized influence* (Bass, 1985).

Moreover, the reference to a "revolution" in the defense industry does not merely signal technical progress but suggests a paradigm shift—indicative of a visionary approach that seeks not to maintain but to fundamentally transform existing structures.

President Vladimir Putin's investments in the defense sector, similarly, extend beyond the pursuit of military superiority. They symbolize the ideological rebirth of Russia as a "rising civilization." This strategy has aimed both to restore national pride and to compensate for the loss of global influence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the 2008 Georgia War, sweeping reforms were introduced that not only provided new military equipment but also restructured command hierarchies, revised combat doctrines, and initiated the professionalization of the Russian military.

Putin's 2018 Federal Assembly address, in which he unveiled the development of hypersonic weapons, included the emphatic declaration: *"No one listened to us. Now they will."* (Putin, 2018). This assertive and confident tone reflects the charismatic and confrontational aspects of transformational leadership, while also overlapping with transactional dimensions—especially deterrence-based strategies. By positioning Russia's military resurgence as both a symbolic and functional instrument of state power, Putin has reinforced a vision of historical continuity and restored strength (Renz, 2018).

Conversely, several of Erdoğan's defense industry statements reflect characteristics of transactional leadership, wherein strategic goals, performance benchmarks, and mutual interests are clearly articulated. For instance:

- *"Our country, a pioneer in electronic warfare, is now among the top 3–4 producers of UAVs and UCAVs worldwide"* (TRT Haber, 2024),
- *"Our anti-ship missile ATMACA, the steel sword of our Blue Homeland, successfully hit its first ship target during the final pre-entry test"* (TRT Haber, 2021), and

- *"The range of the Tayfun missile has been announced as 560 km… We will reach 1,000 km"* (TRT Haber, 2022),
  all reflect outcome-based language centered on measurable success.

Statements such as:

- *"Our resolve to share our defense industry capabilities with our friends is symbolized in the Pakistan MILGEM project, which heralds larger collaborations"* (TRT Haber, 2022), and
- *"IDEF'23, which hosted over 100,000 visitors—15% of whom were foreign—once again made its mark on the defense sector"* (TRT Haber, 2023),

further underscore a transactional orientation, emphasizing strategic cooperation, competitiveness, and deliverable achievements. These expressions illustrate how Erdoğan's leadership in the defense sector reflects a goal-oriented and functional leadership model, particularly suitable for high-tech and strategic domains.

The Pakistan MILGEM project and similar international collaborations underscore the negotiated and interest-based nature of Erdoğan's transactional leadership—highlighting diplomacy as a tool for mutual benefit.

Similarly, Russia's defense industry is characterized by a transactional model structured through state incentives, performance-based support for arms exports, and strict oversight mechanisms. Defense contractors receive financial and administrative privileges contingent on meeting predetermined targets. This approach ensures that defense industry stakeholders remain tethered to the central government within a performance-driven framework.

State-owned conglomerates such as Rostec epitomize this institutionalization of transactional relationships. The presence of Kremlin-aligned figures within Rostec's leadership structure illustrates the blending of personal loyalty and institutional control—a core tenet of transactional leadership. Additionally, the absolute state monopoly over defense budgeting, centralized resource allocation, and the integration of export strategies with foreign policy objectives form the backbone of this leadership style. Putin thus leverages the defense sector as a platform for dual-channel legitimacy: regime loyalty and operational efficiency (Connolly & Hanson, 2012).

In sum, both Erdoğan and Putin demonstrate multifaceted leadership strategies in the defense sector, grounded in classical leadership theories. Erdoğan's rhetoric incorporates the visionary, inspirational, and identity-building components of transformational leadership, while simultaneously employing transactional mechanisms focused on goal attainment, performance metrics, and pragmatic diplomacy.

Likewise, Putin frames the defense industry as a vehicle for national identity, historical mission, and geopolitical projection—traits aligned with transformational leadership. Yet his governance model, particularly in state-controlled defense enterprises, reflects a deeply institutionalized form of transactional leadership, built upon centralized management, reward-punishment systems, and regime-aligned loyalty.

Thus, defense industry policy serves as a strategic domain through which both leaders consolidate domestic legitimacy, shape international positioning, and promote ideologically charged narratives. The sector becomes not merely a matter of technical success but a symbolic and political apparatus at the heart of their leadership performance.

Therefore, the hypothesis "H3: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his defense industry discourse" and the hypothesis "H7: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his defense industry discourse" have been rejected.

4.4. Economic Discourses and Leadership Styles

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's recent statements on economic matters illustrate a clear and ambitious vision designed to motivate followers around shared goals. For example:

- *"The disinflation process that began in May will continue in 2025. We will remain resolute in our fight against profiteers who violate the rules of competition and fuel inflation"* (TRT Haber, 2024), and
- *"We will break free from the vicious cycle of inflation, exchange rates, and interest rates"* (TRT Haber, 2020)
  reflect an effort to instill hope and resolve amid economic uncertainty, with the aim of fostering stability and public confidence. These characteristics are aligned with transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and the mobilization of followers around long-term objectives.

Statements emphasizing social inclusion, such as:

- *"We have allocated a 2-billion-lira guarantee package for our women entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives"* (TRT Haber, 2022), and
- *"We provide at least 75% Treasury-backed guarantees to creditworthy firms lacking sufficient collateral"* (TRT Haber, 2022),
  demonstrate Erdoğan's intent to empower a wider base of economic actors. This inclusive strategy resonates with transformational leadership's focus on individual consideration and empowerment, whereby the leader seeks to uplift and include followers in the broader growth trajectory (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Erdoğan's remarks on overcoming external economic and diplomatic obstacles—

- *"We will soon resolve the visa issue, which has recently turned into a form of political blackmail. We will continue to work tirelessly to eliminate the obstacles you face in all areas"* (TRT Haber, 2023)—
  demonstrate a crisis-responsive and opportunity-seeking leadership style, again consistent with transformational leadership. Here, the leader positions themselves as an agent of change and resilience.

Moreover, large-scale investment projects such as:

- *"With an investment cost of $80 million, the Bandırma Boron Carbide Production Facility will be Turkey's first and one of the world's few plants in this field"* (TRT Haber, 2023), and
- *"Turkish Airlines has contributed $56 billion to our economy and reinforced its leadership in the sector with nearly $16 billion in service exports"* (TRT Haber, 2024),
  highlight Erdoğan's commitment to national development and global competitiveness. These high-impact initiatives serve to cultivate collective pride and a sense of shared purpose among citizens.

Finally, Erdoğan's long-standing ambition—

- *"To make Turkey one of the world's top 10 economies"* (TRT Haber, 2020)—
  epitomizes a transformational vision that aims to inspire both individual and institutional change. It functions as a motivational tool to encourage broad-based engagement with the national economic agenda.

Vladimir Putin, similarly, has emphasized the need for Russia to become a competitive player in the global economic order. In his 2018 Federal Assembly address, he stated:

- *"The Russian people must live in prosperity. A strong economy requires a strong people"* (Putin, 2018),
  while also highlighting the importance of digital transformation and Industry 4.0 as essential components of Russia's future economic strategy. These visionary statements align with transformational leadership, especially in their forward-looking, development-oriented framing.

Following the 2014 Western sanctions, Putin implemented an import substitution strategy, which went beyond economics to reflect an ideological transformation. This mission-oriented discourse—mobilizing citizens not only for material well-being but also for the realization of a *"Greater Russia"*—is emblematic of transformational leadership.

At the same time, transactional leadership features prominently in Putin's economic governance. In statements such as:

- *"Our energy resources are the foundation not only of our prosperity but also of our sovereignty"* (Putin, 2006),
  Putin underscores a realist, strategic view of economic power. From the early 2000s onward, he pursued broad governance reforms—restructuring the tax system, pension programs, and budgetary rules—thus instituting performance-based, state-led mechanisms characteristic of transactional leadership (Rutland, 2015).

Putin's economic order is further typified by state capitalism, where oligarchs loyal to the Kremlin are granted privileges in exchange for political allegiance (Åslund, 2007). This model reflects a transactional system built not on vision, but on reciprocal loyalty and utility, revealing how Putin uses economic leadership as a tool for power consolidation.

Therefore, the hypothesis "H4: Putin exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his economic discourse" and the hypothesis "H8: Erdoğan exhibits only a transactional leadership style in his economic discourse" have been rejected.

5. Conclusion

An analysis of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's leadership discourse across domestic policy, foreign affairs, the defense industry, and the economy reveals a complex and multi-dimensional leadership model that cannot be reduced to a single typology. Erdoğan effectively integrates transformational and transactional leadership styles, adapting his approach to the context. However, his leadership discourse demonstrates a clear preference for transformational leadership, especially in areas such as foreign policy, defense, and economic development—where visionary goals, national pride, collective identity, and ideological mobilization are most evident.

Conversely, in domestic matters—particularly those related to security, authority, and crisis management—transactional leadership becomes more pronounced, as Erdoğan focuses on maintaining order, confronting threats, and directing follower behavior in line with short-term goals.

This duality reflects a leader who does not rely solely on charismatic appeal but incorporates pragmatic, goal-oriented, and context-sensitive strategies to preserve systemic stability. In this light, Erdoğan emerges as a leader who navigates between transformational and transactional approaches, with a dominant orientation toward long-term vision-building, ideological guidance, and public mobilization. Additionally, the year 2015 can be regarded as a turning point in Turkey's defense industry policies under Erdoğan's leadership. From this point onward, Turkey not only focused on developing technologies in land, sea, and air platforms but also transitioned to large-scale industrial production processes. This shift was also reflected in Erdoğan's rhetoric, which began to emphasize domestic capacity and strategic autonomy. In line with the goal of reducing foreign dependency in defense, Turkey embarked on a structural transformation of its strategic capabilities. Erdoğan legitimized this process through narratives centered on strengthening national sovereignty and prioritizing indigenous production. Erdoğan's foreign policy discourse and practices, when examined within the framework of leadership theories, reflect a leadership style that is both short-term interest-oriented (transactional) and flexible, adapting to circumstances (pragmatic). Incidents such as the Pastor Brunson crisis and the 2015 downing of a Russian aircraft illustrate Erdoğan's direct involvement in foreign policy processes and his tendency to steer decisions through leader-centric strategic choices. These cases indicate that Erdoğan adopts an approach that prioritizes adaptability to shifting international dynamics, favoring situational responses over rigid ideological commitments. Following the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, Erdoğan began to intervene more directly and decisively in economic policymaking.
His active involvement in the appointment processes of Central Bank governors, assertive stance on interest rate policies, and guiding remarks on the banking sector indicate a departure from the traditional paradigm of autonomous institutions toward a more leader-centric approach in economic governance. This period can be seen as the beginning of a new phase in which Erdoğan's economic management prioritized political authority over market dynamics.

Putin's leadership exhibits a dynamic fluidity between transformational and transactional approaches. Especially during the 2000–2012 period, an analysis of his discourses in domestic policy, foreign policy, the defense industry, and the economy reveals clear characteristics of transformational leadership, reflected in goals such as rebuilding the system, ensuring national unity, and strengthening the historical identity of the people. However, the post-2012 period—characterized by constitutional reforms, repression of opposition, media control, and elite restructuring—indicates a shift toward a more normatively transactional model, one grounded in the preservation of the status quo, centralization of authority, and loyalty-based governance.

Ultimately, Putin utilizes both leadership styles flexibly, responding to historical and political contingencies. His leadership strategy integrates visionary symbolism with mechanisms of control, creating a hybrid model that reinforces his political dominance and reshapes Russia's national trajectory.

In conclusion, both Erdoğan and Putin emerge as leaders who flexibly apply transformational and transactional leadership approaches depending on contextual conditions. However, while Erdoğan generally exhibits a stronger tendency toward transformational leadership, Putin's shift toward transactional leadership over time is particularly notable. These multidimensional leadership practices demonstrate that both leaders possess the strategic flexibility to manage both change and stability within complex political systems.

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