



## **Illegal pushbacks in Europe: Morally unacceptable, yet widely occurring**

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## **Abstract**

Violations of the principle of non-refoulement, or pushbacks, at the European border have been discussed by international institutions and civil society. Refugees and other migrants are being arbitrarily arrested, detained, and eventually pushed back. Little research has been conducted analyzing this illegal practice and no research has been carried out analyzing the discourse produced around this phenomenon. Therefore, this thesis studies the discourse around pushbacks. Four discourses are being used to analyze the discourse around pushbacks, namely the security threat, national identity, victimization, and human rights discourse. Congruence analysis has been applied to the cases of Greece and Hungary. Moreover, realism and constructivism have been used as the theoretical approaches within this congruence analysis. The security threat discourse falls under realism, and the national identity, victimization and human rights discourse have been discussed under constructivist theory. The results analyze which theoretical approach can best explain the discourse around pushbacks. Discourse produced by governmental actors, NGOs, and international media has been considered. The analysis shows that the human rights and victimization discourse were identified most often, meaning that constructivism, with NGOs as the dominant actor, can best explain the discourse produced. However, since the security threat discourse was also identified, realism plays a complementary role.

**Keywords:** Pushbacks, International Relations, Congruence analysis, Case study

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## List of abbreviations

DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
GCR	Greek Council for Refugees
HHC	Hungarian Helsinki Committee
HRM	Human Rights Watch
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IR	International Relations
MS	Member States
NGO	non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PM	Prime Minister
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In February 2022, the Guardian reported that two migrants drowned after being thrown off a boat into the Aegean Sea (Fallon, 2022). Allegedly, the Greek border police arrested three male migrants and forced them onto boats. Once at sea, they were all pushed from the boat, even though two of them continuously emphasized that they could not swim. These two men drowned (Fallon, 2022).

Reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Parliament (EP) indicate that these type of illegal border operations have become a regular practice at the European border (European Parliament, 2020; UNHCR, 2020). In June 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published a press release urging governments to abstain from using border control tools that endanger the rights of refugees and other migrants (IOM, 2020). The illegal border practice that was used in the case of the two drowned men is an example of a tool that is called “pushback”. Pushbacks occur when refugees and other migrants who wish to enter a country’s territory are not allowed to do so, or when they are already on a country’s national territory and they are being arrested, detained and forced to leave the country (Koros, 2021).

Although specific numbers are not available, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been trying to estimate how often pushbacks occur. For example, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) confirms that at least 12.000 refugees have been pushed back from European territory in 2021, but also admits that this is only “the tip of the iceberg” (Nielsen, 2021). On the other hand, the Guardian talks about 40.000 pushbacks from March 2020 until May 2021 (Tondo, 2021). It is often uncertain where these numbers come from, but it is clear that this illegal practice has received considerable international attention. Various actors have been discussing this phenomenon. International organizations and NGOs have discussed these practices in reports and statements (DRC, 2021; Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2021; Statewatch, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). However, not only NGOs and international organizations write about pushbacks, governments also respond to the allegations of pushbacks taking place on their territory. The interaction between actors produces discourse. Discourse is about the use of language (Van Dijk, 1997). When people interact using this language, discourse is being produced.

## 1.2 Research aim

Extensive literature has been written about migration toward the European Union (EU) (Lavenex, 2001; Morehouse & Blomfield, 2011), and more recently about the 2015 refugee crisis (Harteveld, Schaper, De Lang & Van der Brug, 2017). However, pushbacks have been discussed much less often in the literature. Only a couple of academic articles have been written about this phenomenon (Koros, 2021; Lang and Nagy, 2021). In the past few years, human rights organizations started to focus more on pushbacks and the impact of these illegal practices on refugees and other migrants (DRC, 2021; Euro-



Med Human Rights Monitor, 2021; Statewatch, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Numerous actors, including human rights organizations, are involved in the production of discourse around pushbacks. Although a few academic articles have been written about pushbacks, no literature has been written specifically on the discourses around pushbacks.

Since pushbacks are a sensitive issue that impact the lives of refugees and other migrants, it is of utmost importance that the way actors present their arguments and the interaction between these arguments is understood. Therefore, this thesis aspires to research the discourse around pushbacks at the European border. To understand the discourse produced, theoretical approaches can provide deeper insights. In this thesis, two main international relations (IR) theories [realism and constructivism] will be applied to the discourses. These theories have been chosen because they provide a new perspective on pushbacks. The research question this thesis will answer is the following.

Is realism or constructivism better to explain the discourse around pushbacks at the European border from 2019 until 2022?

### **1.3 Research approach**

The research strategy of this thesis is congruence analysis, in which various theories can be compared. Realism and constructivism will be applied to two cases and the explanatory power of each of these theories will be assessed. Two European countries will be analyzed, namely Greece and Hungary. This thesis is a small N-research that allows for in-depth analysis of the cases. Qualitative methods will be applied in the form of a comparative case study. The discourse produced by various actors will be analyzed based on document analysis. Statements, reports and articles produced by governmental actors, NGOs and international media will be discussed.

### **1.4 Relevance**

This thesis is scientifically as well as societally relevant. Little research has been conducted on pushbacks (Koros, 2021; Lang & Nagy, 2021), so this study will add to research on pushbacks in general. However, since this thesis focuses specifically on discourses, this research will also contribute to the existing body of discourse analyses. Moreover, the theoretically-driven approach of this thesis will provide insights into the relationship between IR and migration, or specifically pushbacks. These two fields are rarely connected in academic literature while they are strongly related to each other (Weiner, 1985). International policies implemented by governments impact migration movements and the arrival of international migrants has been used as a political means by governments to influence relations between states (Weiner, 1985). The discourse around pushbacks will be examined by applying IR theories. This could provide a more practical understanding of these theories since the theories are being applied to an important case. Hence, this thesis contributes to various areas of study.

This thesis also has high societal relevance. Pushbacks affect the most vulnerable. Refugees and other migrants have the right to protection under international law (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2007). However, European countries often do not adhere to their international obligations (Koros, 2021; Lang & Nagy, 2021). Researching the politics behind pushbacks enables us to analyze why certain political choices have been made and what the justifications behind these choices are. Understanding the discourse around pushbacks could enable citizens and other societal actors to hold national governments to account and ensure that pushbacks cease to take place. Moreover, this thesis could provide citizens and civil society with a deeper understanding of the political situation in their country, which is not only relevant when discussing the issue of pushbacks but can also be applied to other human rights challenges.

### **1.5 Thesis outline**

This thesis will be structured in the following way. First, the literature review will elaborate on literature on migration and pushbacks, and important terms will be defined. Specifically, three main discourses on migration will be laid down that form the basis of the analysis. Second, the theoretical framework explains the assumptions of realism and constructivism and develops propositions that will be tested. In the fourth chapter, the research design will discuss the research strategy chosen and the selected cases. Thereafter, the empirical analysis will apply congruence analysis to the selected cases. In the discussion, the findings will be examined considering already existing literature. Finally, interesting conclusions will be drawn from the analysis. The conclusion will also lay down the limitations of this thesis, make recommendations for future research and discuss the practical implications of the findings.

## 2. Literature review

This chapter will discuss already existing literature related to the research question. First, the meaning of the terms migrant, refugee, and irregular migrant will be laid down. An understanding should be developed of the meaning of these terms because refugees and other so-called irregular migrants are the ones being pushed back at the European border. Thereafter, the principle of non-refoulement will be discussed to understand the legal background behind the prohibition of pushbacks, because this principle lays down the prohibition of pushbacks in international law. Thirdly, articles of authors discussing pushbacks at the European border will be touched upon. Furthermore, the meaning of the term discourse will be explained. Lastly, this chapter will discuss three discourses on migration, and their subtypes, that will form the basis for the analysis of discourses around pushbacks today.

### 2.1 Migrant, refugee and “irregular” migrant: terminology and definitions

To begin with, the term “migrant” should be defined. In international politics, the term migrant has not been universally defined (OHCHR, n.d.). The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (n.d.) defined a migrant as “any person who is outside a State of which they are a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, their State of birth or habitual residence”. In other words, the term migrant is a broad term and is used to describe any people that lack citizenship of the country they are currently residing (OHCHR, n.d.).

On the other hand, the term refugee is strictly defined under international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention describes a refugee as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” (UNHCR, 2010., p. 3 [introductory note]). Refugees enjoy the right to legal protection which includes protection from return to their country of origin where their freedom or life is in jeopardy (OHCHR, n.d.).

The words illegal, irregular, unauthorized, and undocumented are all used to describe people staying in Europe without legal permission to do so. It includes a wide range of situations: from a foreigner working without a permit to someone who stays beyond his or her permitted visa period (Guild, 2004). However, the terms have different connotations (Morehouse & Blomfield, 2011). “Illegal” has been associated with criminal activities. International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), have stressed the importance of finding neutral terminology when discussing international migration (Morehouse & Blomfield, 2011). They emphasize that human beings cannot be illegal and that “illegality implies criminality” (Sajjad, 2018, p. 55). Therefore, international organizations and NGOs prefer the term irregular.

The terms unauthorized and undocumented are less frequently used. Since many irregular migrants do in fact have documents, such as passports, the term undocumented might be misleading

(Morehouse & Blomfield, 2011). Unauthorized has a similar connotation as irregular, but irregular started to prevail in the public sphere (Morehouse & Blomfield, 2011).

## **2.2 Principle of non-refoulement**

The principle of non-refoulement is a non-derogable right, meaning that it is absolute and that no infringements are allowed. More specifically, Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention states that no country can remove “a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 30). Beyond the 1951 Convention, non-refoulement is included in human rights law. For example, Article 45 of the 1949 Geneva Convention lays down the principle (UN, 1949). In other words, the principle of non-refoulement prohibits the removal of people to a place where their life and freedom are in jeopardy, which includes not sending someone to places where they can become subject to degrading treatment.

Importantly, all persons crossing an international border are protected under refugee and human rights law (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2007), meaning that not only refugees but also (irregular) migrants enjoy this protection. In other words, the principle applies to asylum seekers in a broader sense, and when asylum seekers are automatically rejected, without the conduction of a detailed assessment, this is a violation of the non-refoulement principle (Gyollai & Amatrudo, 2018).

## **2.3 Pushbacks: discussions in the literature**

The opposite of the principle of non-refoulement is illegal refoulement. Koros (2021) defined the concept of illegal refoulement or pushback as the arbitrary removal of irregular migrants without providing them with the opportunity to ask for asylum or challenge their arrest and expulsion. If refugees and other migrants are at the border and intend to enter a country’s territory but are denied entry, this also falls under the term pushback (Lang & Nagy, 2021).

Although no literature has been written specifically on the discourse around pushbacks, several academic articles discuss pushbacks as a phenomenon. Gatta (2019) argued that, as a response to the high immigration flow (of the 2015 refugee crisis but also after), frontline Member States (MS) started to adopt informal measures. These informal policies fall outside the traditional EU legal framework. Examples of such atypical measures are pushbacks, illegal detention, and border deterrence. When police engage in border deterrence, they spot possible asylum seekers far before the border and threaten them to scare them away (Lang & Nagy, 2021). These informal measures have led to “rule of law backsliding” (Gatta, 2019, p. 131). Lang and Nagy (2021) argue that the approach of MS towards the principle of non-refoulement has changed while the definition of the principle in EU law has not. The principle of non-refoulement is still laid down in EU law, but governments are engaging more in pushbacks (Lang & Nagy, 2021). This has led to a discrepancy between the international obligations of the EU and MS’ illegal practices (Lang & Nagy, 2021).

Koros (2021) goes even further and claims that pushbacks have become a central policy tool in EU border control. Koros (2021) bases this claim on the number of times pushbacks have been occurring, and on the observation of human rights organizations that border guards engage in a systematic process, meaning that pushbacks are common and carried out in an organized manner. He refers to reports and statements from various organizations, such as NGOs, the UNHCR, and the EP to support his arguments (Koros, 2021).

The arguments of these scholars point to an apparent acceptance of pushbacks as an informal policy tool. However, academic articles do not go deeper into how actors present their arguments and what the dynamics behind these pushback discussions are. This thesis will go deeper into this. Moreover, the discussion of this thesis will engage with the arguments of these academics. The discussion will examine whether the current discourses around pushbacks align with the apparent acceptance of pushbacks as an informal policy tool, as argued by these academic scholars (Gatta, 2019; Koros, 2021; Lang and Nagy, 2021). The following section will discuss what is meant by “discourse” in the literature.

#### **2.4 Discourse: definition and related terms**

Discourse can broadly be understood as the use of language by people (Van Dijk, 1997). Discourse is about language and interaction, but not about actions themselves. According to Van Dijk (1997), discourse has three main dimensions: language, communication of ideas, and interactions between actors. These three elements combined construct discourse. Actors use language to communicate beliefs and ideas and interact in a societal context with other actors.

An influential author in discourse theory is Foucault (2002), who argues that ideas that have historically been seen as a common truth change over time. He argues that there is no objectivity in this world. There is only subjectivity which shapes societal interactions (Foucault, 2002). Moreover, some actors are more influential than others, making power a strong force in these interactions.

Framing is a way through which actors can structure phenomena. Rein and Schön (1993) describe framing as “a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting” (p. 146). In other words, frames are a lens through which someone can look at a phenomenon. Actors use several means to advocate for their frame, such as the use of catchy slogans and numbers to support their story. Furthermore, discourse is closely related to rhetoric, which is the “science and art of persuasive language” (Reisigl, 2008, p. 96). Political rhetoric, which is often used in discussions on migration, can be understood as arguments used to convince others of a political opinion (Condor, Tileaga & Billig, 2013). When politicians or societal actors present policies or reports, they use rhetoric. National and international media reiterate or criticize this rhetoric, and the people consume this, bringing discourse into existence.

## **2.5 Three discourses on migration**

In policy discussions and media coverage on migration and pushbacks, various discourses can be identified. These discourses are often referred to implicitly in academics (De Haas, Natter & Vezzoli, 2016; Ferreira, 2010; Messina, 2014; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Wodak, 2015). Therefore, this thesis derived discourses from the literature and conceptualized these. When discourse analyses about migration are being conducted, the aim of analyzing discourse is often to research the perception of migration movements. Analyzing discourse in migration is often linked to the way actors, such as media and governments, perceive and portray these migrants (Eberl et al., 2018; Krotofil & Motak, 2018; O'Regan & Riordan, 2018). After a careful literature review, three discourses on migration have been derived from the literature: economic, securitization, and humanitarian. These discourses again have subtypes. The discourses have been derived from migration literature in general. However, they can be applied specifically to pushbacks because pushbacks are being carried out as a response to migration movements.

### **2.5.1 Economic discourse**

Historically, migration was seen as a driving force behind economic development (Ferreira, 2010). When migration was analyzed from a cost-benefit perspective, the benefit side prevailed. Under economists, the conclusion that immigration positively impacts the receiving country has been widely accepted (Portes, 2019). A higher level of immigration even causes an increase in the number of jobs for working citizens (Portes, 2019).

However, since the 1990s, refugees and other migrants have increasingly been perceived as a disruption to national order (Ferreira, 2010), and “as fraudulent profiteers capitalizing on the wealth created by the established” (Huymans, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, there are two sides to the economic discourse today: negative and positive discourse. Migrants are either perceived as a threat to the jobs of native workers, or they are valued because of the skills and knowledge they bring to the workforce (De Haas et al., 2016).

#### *2.5.1.1 Negative economic discourse*

Under the negative economic discourse, refugees and other migrants are associated with economic problems, such as poverty and unemployment. The additional workforce provided by migrants is perceived as a threat to the jobs of low-income citizens (De Haas et al., 2016). If citizens lose their jobs, this is because migrants have taken these jobs. Related to this discourse is the idea that migrants solely seek economic benefits (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002; Huymans, 2006), which suggests that migrants want to profit from the social security systems in Western countries. This idea seems to be contradictory to perceiving migrants as a threat to citizens' jobs since it implies that migrants are not eager to provide a living for themselves. However, in practice, both ideas have similar connotations. Refugees and other migrants are perceived as a burden to Western society.

### *2.5.1.2 Positive economic discourse*

On the other hand, the positive economic discourse perceives migration as an economic opportunity (De Haas et al., 2016). Migrants bring along skills and knowledge that they can use in their hosting country. They are perceived as a new working force that could contribute to the country's wealth. Therefore, this discourse focuses on wealth maximization. In sum, the negative economic discourse sees migration as a burden, whereas the positive economic discourse perceives the same phenomenon as an opportunity.

### **2.5.2 Securitization discourse**

The securitization discourse perceives migration as a security issue (Ahmed, 2020). More specifically, securitization is the transformation of non-security challenges into security issues because of securitizing speeches given by influential actors (Messina, 2014). The move to securitization consists of three phases: migration moves from being non-politicized to politicized, and eventually becomes a securitized issue (Ahmed, 2020). Buzan, Weaver and De Wilde (1998), as cited by Ahmed (2020), wrote the book "*Security: A new framework for analysis*", which was one of the first pieces to introduce a connection between security and migration. The argument made was that when "X people are being overrun or diluted by influxes of Y people; the X community will not be what it used to be" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 121), which can form a threat to societal security.

European populists have been associated with the increased securitization of migration (Van Kessel, 2015). These parties have expressed hostility towards refugees as well as other so-called nationalist ideas (Van Kessel, 2015), but they are often not part of the national governments of European countries. However, these parties are still influential in shaping European migration discourse, because they mobilize anti-migration sentiments among the population. When populist parties become successful through the mobilization of these sentiments, government parties feel pressured to adopt a similar discourse (Zaun, 2018). When these parties start to publicly blame the government for the inflow of migrants, the cabinet is being pressured even more (Zaun, 2018). Following this introduction, two subtypes have been derived from the securitization discourse, namely the security threat discourse and the national identity discourse.

#### *2.5.2.1 Security threat discourse*

The security threat discourse is the most obvious sub-type of the securitization discourse. Under this discourse, refugees and other migrants are portrayed as a physical threat to the lives of Europeans (Ahmed, 2020). Terrorism has been influential in driving negative attitudes towards refugees and other migrants (Nussio, Bove & Steele, 2019). Terrorist attacks have been linked to the inflow of migrants to highlight the danger of migration movements for European citizens. Furthermore, the hardened discourse around migration, which is part of the security threat discourse, has initially been associated with the success of populist parties (Wodak, 2015). These parties engage in a rhetoric of fear, depicting

asylum seekers as a threat “to us”, and legitimizing their claims by referring to public order (Wodak, 2015).

#### *2.5.2.2 National identity discourse*

The national identity discourse focuses on cultural heritage. Differences in culture is used as a reason for the classification of migrants and other refugees as a threat (Ferreira, 2010). Migrants are not perceived as a physical threat; they are rather seen as a threat to the national identity of a country (Kaya & Tecman, 2019). The call of populist parties to de-Islamize Europe is an example of this discourse. Islam has been portrayed as a religion that does not align with the European way of life (Kaya & Tecmen, 2019). Hence, Muslims should not be allowed to enter European territory. Populist parties have created a national and European identity based on anti-Muslim racism (Kaya & Tecmen, 2019). The national identity discourse is a sub-type of the securitization discourse since it focuses on migration as a threat which is an essential part of the securitization discourse.

### **2.5.3 Humanitarian discourse**

Compared to the economic and securitization discourse, the humanitarian discourse appeals more to the morality of governments and the obligation to assist disadvantaged people and respect their human rights. The humanitarian discourse can be divided into two sub-types: human rights discourse and victimization discourse.

#### *2.5.3.1 Human rights discourse*

The human rights discourse focuses on the responsibility of governments to protect the individual rights of all people, meaning that migrants will be permitted to access a country’s territory and receive the chance to ask for asylum (Heinze, 2006). At the same time, their legal rights should be respected, such as the right to consult with an attorney, and they should not be subject to degrading treatment. The discourse emphasizes the universality of human rights and the importance of refugee protection (Heinze, 2006).

#### *2.5.3.2 Victimization discourse*

According to Pallister-Wilkins (2015), NGOs often use this discourse to challenge the illegal border practices of EU countries. Under the victimization discourse, migrants, and particularly refugees, are being portrayed as victims who need protection (Sajjad, 2018). When migrants are being perceived as victims, they are seen as people who have survived war and wait in a refugee camp for the Europeans to save them (Sajjad, 2018). Pictures that show victimhood can be used to generate empathy among the European population, which can help to establish public support for the reception of migrants. Therefore, the discourse frames the arrival of refugees in an emotional manner to appeal to people's moral compass. In other words, the focus is on humanitarian assistance. The discourse has been linked



to concepts such as sympathy and compassion (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Moreover, supporters of this discourse refer to the concept of solidarity which has a central place in migration literature (Bauder & Juffs, 2020). In the context of political unrest, solidarity has been described as an eagerness to share resources (both material and immaterial) based on a common feeling of loyalty to help each other (Oosterlynck, Loopmans, Schuermans, Vandenabeele & Zemni, 2016). In sum, the central elements of the victimization discourse are victims, morality, protection, and solidarity.

In conclusion, there are six types of discourses that can be used in this thesis, namely the negative economic discourse, the positive economic discourse, the security threat discourse, the national identity discourse, the human rights discourse and the victimization discourse.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The two IR theories [realism and constructivism] that will be applied in this thesis will be discussed in this chapter and propositions will be developed for each theoretical approach. Since these IR theories are originally theories about state behavior and intervention, this chapter will illustrate how IR theories can be applied to discourses around pushbacks.

There are three main IR theories: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Only two theories will be applied in this thesis, meaning that liberalism will not be applied. Liberalism introduces a theory that focuses on citizens' freedoms (Dunne, 2020). Liberalists reject the claim that war is inevitable. Strong relationships between countries make these states dependent on each other and make war unthinkable (Dunne, 2020). For example, countries that engage in international trade are unlikely to start a conflict. More specifically, liberalism highlights that cooperation leads to peace (Dunne, 2020). When applying this theoretical approach to discourses around pushbacks, the economic discourse would be focused upon. Since liberalists see (economic) cooperation as a positive development that leads to peace, the positive economic discourse would be expected to be leading.

However, building on the literature review, it can be questioned whether the economic discourse will be found in the discourse around pushbacks at all. The principle of non-refoulement is a fundamental human right and is laid down in international law. On the other hand, it is expected that populist parties will emphasize the protection of borders when discussing pushbacks (Harteveld et al., 2017). Moreover, the literature already written on pushbacks discusses human rights and security (Koros, 2021; Lang & Nagy, 2020), whereas economic factors are not considered. In other words, pushbacks raise concerns about rights and security. An economic way of thinking seems not to fit with this specific phenomenon of migration. This would be a least-likely case when trying to explain the discourse around pushbacks. Therefore, the choice has been made not to include liberalism as a theory, and not to include the economic discourse.

Furthermore, both realism and constructivism have sub-streams, meaning that within these theories, there are multiple sub-theories or sub-models that have developed over time. However, the propositions will be derived from the overarching theories (not the sub-branches). This choice has been made because IR theories have not been applied to the discourse around pushbacks before. It is important to first develop a better understanding of how these theories can be applied in general, before applying sub-branches of these theories to cases.

#### **3.1 Realism**

Within realism, there are three main streams: classical realism, neorealism (or structural realism), and neoclassical realism (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). Authors associated with classical realism are Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). Although these authors wrote at different times, they share the view that international politics is a continuous struggle for power.

Furthermore, Morgenthau (originally 1948; 1978), who is one of the most influential classical realists, argued that human beings are intrinsically motivated to continuously increase their power over others (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020).

The dominance of classical realism was challenged when Waltz published the *“Theory of International Politics”* (1979) which established neorealism or structural realism. Instead of arguing that human nature is responsible for the power struggle in politics, Waltz (1979), as cited by Dunne and Schmidt (2020), argued that the structure of the international system causes this power struggle. Waltz (1979) defined two principles: anarchy and hierarchy. To illustrate, the scope condition of the international system is anarchy, meaning that there is a lack of overarching authority above the national governments. On the other hand, hierarchy forms the basis of the domestic systems (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). Within countries, the domestic hierarchical structure determines who has power and who has not. Waltz (1979) argued that countries must be aware of the capabilities of other states. These other countries may use force to interfere with their sovereignty which causes them to worry about survival and security.

A new branch of realism has emerged since the end of the Cold War, namely neoclassical realism. These scholars recognize that the distribution of power is important in the international system, however, other factors such as the perception of politicians are as well (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). Compared to neorealism, which assumes that states have similar types of interests, neoclassical realists argue that, in practice, this is not the case (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). Some countries have an interest in expanding their territory, while others are satisfied with the status quo. States cannot be treated as equal units, because there are large differences between states (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020).

Although the three perspectives vary, this thesis will analyze realism as one overarching theory. Therefore, the themes that broadly define realism will be explained. The three core elements of all strands of realism are statism, survival, and self-help (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020).

First, the sovereign state is central. The state has the authority to make legislation and enforce these laws (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). In the domestic realm, challenges of security can be solved by handing over authority to the nation-state. In the international system, this is more difficult. Without a higher authority in place, states compete for power over others whereby less power for one, means more power for another. Thus, it is a zero-sum game in which relative gains play a crucial role. The second assumption is that all states have an interest in survival. Since other states can use force to interfere with a country’s sovereignty, countries must be prepared to always defend their sovereignty. Self-help is the final concern for realists (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). This concern is strongly related to the concept of anarchy. The absence of a higher authority leads to a situation in which security can only be realized through self-help. A country can only rely on its people for security. However, by investing in its security, insecurity in other countries can be fueled. Other countries could see the investments in the military as a threat to their sovereignty. Therefore, investments in the military of one state will likely be mirrored by another state (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020).

### 3.1.1 Realist propositions

The main discourses identified in the literature review should be linked to realism. In the literature review, several discourses on migration have been discussed. A study by McLean (2016) applies neoclassical realism to discourse in Australian foreign policy. In this article, the security threat discourse, with a focus on threat and national security, has been presented as an indicator of realist thinking (McLean, 2016). The propositions should be based on the three main assumptions of realism: statism, survival, and self-help. The assumptions of survival and self-help are closely related to each other, since they both emphasize that the state needs to protect itself against interference from other countries. The discourses from the literature review will be elaborated upon in the analysis through frames used by societal actors. In these frames, references to survival and self-help have been made.

Realists would most likely not condemn pushbacks, they would rather justify pushbacks referring to the need to protect the population, and the right of the state to make decisions over what happens on its territory. Therefore, the justification of pushbacks is the starting point of the first two sub-propositions. However, some actors might not justify pushbacks but still use the security threat discourse, since this discourse also focuses on security and national order more generally. In the discourse around pushbacks, actors could emphasize the importance of border security while not justifying pushbacks. Therefore, the last sub-proposition covers border security in general. These sub-propositions are connected to the main discourse (R1) as they dive deeper into the frames used by societal actors.

*R1* The security threat discourse will be most dominant in the discourse around pushbacks.

*R1.1* Pushbacks will be justified by framing refugees and other migrants as a threat to European citizens.

*R1.2* Pushbacks will be justified by framing refugees and other migrants as intruders that do not respect the sovereignty of the European population.

*R1.3* The discourse around pushbacks will be focused on border security and national order.

The third assumption of realism is statism, meaning that realism focuses on the role of the state. If realism can best explain the narrative built around pushbacks, the role of the state will be emphasized. The dominance of the role of the state will be discussed in this thesis to analyze this assumption of realist theory and this way the explanatory power of realism will be assessed.

All states are inherently focused on self-interest and do not trust the intentions of other states. The state consists of governments making decisions. These leaders would emphasize the state's sovereignty. Since the state is central, realism pays little attention to non-governing actors. However, following the literature review, it is expected that other actors such as populist parties will also engage in the securitization discourse (Van Kessel, 2015). These non-governing actors are not considered in realist theory, because the state, as in the leading governing party, determines foreign policy and its

discourse. Nevertheless, this thesis expects that other actors will also engage in discourses around pushbacks. The first proposition is, therefore, applicable to all actors. The analysis of this proposition will investigate whether actors frame pushbacks in a realist way. However, the last proposition is especially focused on the dominant role of the state within realism. The analysis will assess whether the state was dominant in the discourse produced or whether this assumption of realism was not found in practice.

*R2 National governments will be presented as the leading actor in the discourse around pushbacks.*

*R2.1 National governments will emphasize the sovereignty of the nation-state.*

*R2.2 National governments will justify pushbacks by referring to the need to protect their citizens.*

*R2.3 Non-governing parties will not be leading in the discourse around pushbacks.*

### **3.2 Constructivism**

Whereas realism does not consider how norms and culture shape interests and preferences, constructivism does (Barnett, 2020). Social constructivism is one of the youngest theories in IR. The terms social constructivism and constructivism are used interchangeably in the literature (Barnett, 2020). This thesis will use the term constructivism to refer to this theory.

This theory emerged at the end of the Cold War. Constructivist thinkers argued that realism and liberalism cannot explain certain events. The outcome of the Cold War was not predicted by these theories (Barnett, 2020). Realists and liberalists predicted that it would end in a nuclear war. When nothing disastrous happened, this allowed constructivists to show that ideas influence a country's interests (Barnett, 2020). Constructivists argue that values and norms should be included in explanations of how international politics works (Barnett, 2020). According to constructivists, reality is socially constructed, implying that knowledge and symbols influence how people interpret the world. The theory is interested in how actors influence the international system and how the system impacts these actors. Another assumption is that states are not separate units. Countries interact and "intersubjective" norms emerge that start to exist between states, meaning that these norms are shared by multiple actors (Wendt, 1992). These norms ensure there is a certain degree of understanding between states.

Wendt (1999), ushered in constructivist theory, argued that idealism and holism are core elements of constructivism. Idealism stresses that ideas play an important role in international politics. The way people interpret reality is dependent on our ideas. From the perspective of holism, societal structures cannot be divided into separate units, because these structures are more than the sum of individual units (Barnett, 2020). Holism explains that actors constantly interact which makes the world a social place and these interactions of ideas are larger than the sum of the properties of individual actors. This does not mean that holism does not provide space for agency (Barnett, 2020). Actors have autonomy which can help to transform the international system. To exemplify, during the Cold War,

the international system seemed to lock the United States and the Soviet Union into a race to the bottom, however, political leaders eventually transformed the system and peace became possible (Barnett, 2020).

Like realism, constructivists do not deny that the international system is of anarchic nature. However, Wendt (1992) claims that “anarchy is what states make of it” (p. 395), meaning that anarchy looks different when two countries have been friendly to each other and maintain close relationships, compared to when countries see each other as enemies. The anarchic environment does not play an important role if countries trust each other. Thus, anarchy looks different depending on whether a country is dealing with an enemy, a rival, or a friend (Wendt, 1992).

Furthermore, the acceptance of global norms leads to a homogenization of the international system. Countries have started to organize their domestic societies in similar ways. These common norms have evolved through a life cycle. The norm life cycle consists of three stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and internalization (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the norm emergence stage, norm entrepreneurs frame problems to draw attention to the topic. They try to change the norm landscape. If enough countries support a norm, the second stage is reached, in which the norm spreads to other populations. Countries do not accept the norm because domestic coalitions advocate for this but because they are being influenced by the international community (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). When a norm has been internalized, it will be applied without people being aware of its existence. In this stage, norms are taken for granted and not questioned anymore (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

### **3.2.1 Constructivist propositions**

Constructivism is intrinsically connected to discourse. Therefore, everything related to discourse, framing, and rhetoric can be seen in light of constructivism. However, since this thesis applies two IR theories to discourses around pushbacks, careful consideration should be made of what qualifies as constructivism and what fits better with realism. Unlike realism, constructivism has contrasting propositions. Constructivism is not only pro-refugees and human rights but can also reflect strong ideas opposing migration movements to Europe. This section will explain why this thesis considers the propositions below to fall under constructivism.

First, the victimization discourse is closely related to constructivism. Constructivists consider norms to be of importance. The victimization discourse uses stories that show victimhood to generate sympathy among the European population (Sajjad, 2018). Constructivists appeal to societal norms and people’s values, and in this case, they would stress that EU countries should not push back refugees and other migrants because these people are victims. Moreover, the human rights discourse, which is related to the victimization discourse can also be discussed under constructivism. The framing of pushbacks as a violation and an illegal practice fits with a constructivist way of thinking. In other words, the victimization and human rights discourse fall under constructivism, which can be illustrated by referring to existing research. For example, Aradau (2004), who researched human trafficking of women,

emphasized that constructivists discuss emotions and morality, which is closely connected to the victimization discourse, while she also states that constructivists refer to human trafficking as a threat to the human rights of women. This is similar to the way this thesis applies the human rights discourse to pushbacks.

On the other hand, the national identity discourse is also part of constructivism. Research by Theys (2017) perceives national identity as an important indicator of constructivism since national identity is socially constructed and closely related to a country's culture. Cultural differences between migrants and the European population are used as an argument against hosting refugees.

Although these discourses (victimization, human rights, and national identity discourse) are different, they can all be dominant when constructivism can best explain the discourse around pushbacks. Looking specifically at the frames used in these discourses, pushbacks will be condemned by the victimization discourse. This discourse will portray refugees and other migrants as victims that need to be saved. They do not harm the European population. Following the constructivist theory, these people are seen as friends. As discussed, the human rights discourse presents pushbacks as an illegal practice and a violation of human rights. Thus, pushbacks will be condemned by the human rights discourse as well. Furthermore, the focus is on cultural heritage for the national identity discourse. Since the national identity discourse has been identified as part of the securitization discourse, the emphasis on refugees and other migrants as a threat to cultural heritage becomes clear. This threat includes a different culture, and religion as well as a broader idea of doing things differently than the European way. Contrary to seeing these people as friends, under this discourse, refugees and other migrants are perceived as enemies. Therefore, pushbacks will be justified.

*C1* The victimization discourse will be dominant in the discourse around pushbacks.

*C1.1* Pushbacks will be condemned, framing refugees and other migrants as victims of pushbacks.

*C2* The human rights discourse will be dominant in the discourse around pushbacks.

*C2.1* Pushbacks will be condemned, framing pushbacks as an illegal practice and a violation of the human rights of refugees and other migrants.

*C3* The national identity discourse will be dominant in the discourse around pushbacks.

*C3.1* Pushbacks are justified because refugees and other migrants form a threat to the cultural heritage of the native European population.

Wendt (1992), as cited by Agius (2016), argues that the system is not set in stone, but is shaped by the actions of actors. The interaction between states is still important under constructivism, but other non-governing actors also play a role in constructing the world around them. Constructivism acknowledges

that actors have agency (Jackson, 2009). Hence, non-governing parties influence the discourse produced. This thesis will assess whether this expectation of constructivism is found in practice.

Populist parties and NGOs would most likely produce the discourses presented under constructivism. Populists would use the national identity discourse (Kaya & Tecman, 2019), since they use anti-migration rhetoric and portray migrants as people that do not belong in Europe. They even claimed that governments should de-Islamize their countries (Kaya & Tecman, 2019). Moreover, NGOs would use the human rights and victimization discourse (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). NGOs would use the humanitarian discourse to encourage governments to abstain from engaging in illegal border practices. They emphasize the universality of human rights and appeal to the moral compass of governments and citizens (Pallister-Wilkin, 2015). If the humanitarian discourse would be most dominant, NGOs would most likely be the leading actor and if the national identity discourse would be identified most often, populists would be the dominant actor.

Diving deeper into the discourse produced by populists and NGOs, this thesis argues that populists and NGOs will try to frame time periods to their advantage in order to strengthen their rhetoric. On the one hand, populists present their objectives as urgent and claim that a crisis exists that they must respond to (Moffitt, 2015; Rooduijn, 2014). They can frame the inflow of migrants as a crisis. On the other hand, NGOs can frame a period as a wealthy and comfortable one with a stable political climate. NGOs can emphasize the hardships refugees and other migrants are going through (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015), while the Europeans are wealthy and have the resources to support these migrants. Importantly, both the crisis period of populists and the stable political climate period of NGOs are socially constructed. Populist parties will frame a specific period as a crisis, while NGOs could frame the same period differently. Two propositions (with sub-propositions) follow from the discussion above.

*C4* Populist parties will use the national identity discourse.

*C4.1* Populist parties will frame pushbacks as an adequate response in times of crisis.

*C5* NGOs will use the humanitarian discourse (both victimization and human rights discourse).

*C5.1* NGOs will frame pushbacks as a human rights violation in a time in which the EU has the resources and responsibility to support these refugees and other migrants.



## **4. Research design**

In this chapter, the research design will be laid down. First, the research strategy will be explained and the reason why this strategy has been chosen will be briefly discussed. Thereafter, the selection of theories will be elaborated upon. Afterward, the cases will be selected. Fourth, the way data will be collected is going to be discussed. In the analysis, the propositions will be tested. Therefore, a closer look will be taken at the operationalization of the propositions. Lastly, validity and reliability concerns of the research design will be touched upon.

### **4.1 Methodology: Congruence analysis**

Congruence analysis is the research strategy that has been chosen for this thesis. In a congruence analysis, the explanatory power of multiple theories can be assessed (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). It can be concluded that a theory can better explain the case under research, if there is a stronger congruence between elements of this theory and the evidence of the case, compared to the level of congruence between elements of another theoretical approach and evidence of the case (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). Congruence analysis has been chosen because it is most suitable to answer the research question. The research question asks whether realism or constructivism can best explain the discourse around pushbacks and congruence analysis allows for comparing the explanatory power of these IR theories.

### **4.2 Selection of theories**

Blatter and Haverland (2012) highlight two approaches within congruence analysis: competing theories approach and complementary theories approach. This thesis will apply a complementary approach, which suggests that multiple theories combined can provide a comprehensive explanation of complex phenomena (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). With the variety of actors involved, such as governments and NGOs, it will be useful to apply multiple theories which can explain different aspects of the discourse. This means that one theory explains some elements of the phenomenon better, while the other theory can explain other parts of the case. Furthermore, constructivist theory has more propositions than realism. Therefore, it might seem that constructivism is more likely to explain the discourse around pushbacks than realism. However, since this thesis applies a complementary approach, this will not be a problem. The two theories can probably explain different parts of the discourse around pushbacks, which allows for an interesting analysis to be written.

### **4.3 Selection of cases**

After the selection of theories, cases should be selected. Two countries will be analyzed because selecting only two countries provides us with the opportunity to dive deep into the discourse produced. Moreover, differences between the two countries can be highlighted. Countries should be selected

where pushbacks occur because in these countries societal actors can construct a discourse around this phenomenon.

### **4.3.1 Greece**

First, Greece has been selected as a case study. The country has been accused many times of carrying out illegal refoulements. In 2020, the UNHCR encouraged the Greek government to investigate reports stating pushbacks are carried out by national authorities (UNHCR, 2020). Although precise numbers are not available, almost 26.000 people (estimated by NGO Aegean Boat Report, 2022) have illegally been pushed back from March 2020 until the end of 2021. Most refugees and other migrants are being pushed back to Turkey by boat. NGOs such as the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) write about this issue (GCR in collaboration with Oxfam, 2021). Greek politicians respond to the allegations and the media write about this. However, the Greek government often denies pushbacks taking place on its territory (Koros, 2021). It seems difficult to research the discourse around pushbacks if politicians deny the illegal practices are taking place. Nevertheless, since Greek politicians respond to the allegations (Koros, 2021), discourse is still being produced and can be analyzed.

### **4.3.2 Hungary**

Hungary will also be analyzed as a case study. Instead of pushbacks over sea, in Hungary, pushbacks have been taking place over land. In 2020, an estimated 25.600 people were pushed back from Hungarian territory and more than 14.000 migrants were not allowed to enter the country, which is also a violation of the non-refoulement principle (AIDA, 2020). Like Greece, the Hungarian government has responded to these allegations as well as human rights organizations. However, the Hungarian government's response is expected to be different. The Hungarian government is of populist nature (Ilonszki & Vajda, 2021). Therefore, a different type of response is expected, compared to the center-right conservative Greek government (Smith, 2019).

## **4.4 Data collection**

Six main sources that can be used to gather data for case studies have been identified by Yin (2009), which are "documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artefacts" (Yin, 2009, p. 99). This thesis will rely on already existing documentation. A distinction must be made between primary and secondary documents. For the analysis, primary sources will mainly be used. These sources have been divided into three categories: government statements, NGO reports, and international newspaper articles. Tables 1 and 2 show the number of documents analyzed per actor. Since the government statements are often originally in Greek or Hungarian, these statements will be derived from newspaper articles published in English in which politicians have been quoted. Only the parts where government officials have been quoted literally will qualify as government statements. Moreover, speeches and press conferences provided by the Prime Minister (PM) will be

categorized as government statements. During these speeches, the PM speaks on behalf of the government. However, for Greece, articles of populist parties will also be discussed. Since Hungary is already led by a populist party (Ilonszki & Vajda, 2021), for Hungary this will not be the case. In Greece, the statements will be limited to comments of the populist party Greek Solution, since this is the main populist party in Greek politics (Samaris, 2020).

For Greece, reports of the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Oxfam International, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch (HRM) will be investigated. For Hungary, reports of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC), HRM, and Protecting Rights at Borders (coalition of NGOs) will be analyzed. These NGOs have been selected because of the prominent role they play in EU advocacy. Some reports contain information on multiple countries. If this is the case, only the information about the country discussed will be analyzed.

Furthermore, newspaper articles from Politico, EUobserver, and EurActiv have been selected for Greece and Hungary to analyze how the international media respond to pushbacks in these countries. These newspapers have been selected because they are well-known reliable sources. Fewer newspaper articles have been selected for Hungary, meaning that less relevant articles have been found on these platforms for Hungary. Importantly, although government statements and statements of populist parties were often found in newspaper articles, this thesis makes a clear distinction between newspaper articles used to find government statements and newspaper articles used to present the perspective of international media. Only articles from Politico, EurActiv, and EUobserver have been included to present the position of international media. For the government statements, various newspapers have been used that literally quote government officials to find as many government statements as possible. The newspapers are clearly used for different purposes. In Appendix I and Appendix II an overview can be found of all analyzed sources.

Secondary sources will barely be used in the analysis. However, in the discussion, this thesis will reflect on the findings and discuss the contributions to the literature. In the discussion, secondary literature will be used to contextualize the results.

Table 1: Documents per actor for Greece

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Number</b>
Government	6
Populist Parties	3
NGOs	8
International media	8

*Note:* Data gathering carried out by the author. This is the most comprehensive set of documents given the topic and language limitations.

Table 2: Documents per actor for Hungary

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Number</b>
Government	7
NGOs	6
International media	5

*Note:* Data gathering carried out by the author. This the most comprehensive set of documents given the topic and language limitations.

#### **4.5 Measurement**

To answer the research question, the propositions will be tested in the analysis. Table 3 presents an overview of codes that have been developed based on document analysis. These codes are indicators of terms that will be found in documents and newspaper articles if a certain discourse is present. These codes are keywords that will be searched for in documents. Each time a code is found in the document, a point will be written down. By adding up these points, the importance of each discourse will be determined. Slight variations (e.g., plural/singular forms) of these codes will also be counted. In other words, content analysis in the form of counting codes will be conducted. This way the thesis will determine what discourses are leading. The codes are also indicators of the frames through which the discourses are perpetuated. The coding scheme consists of overarching themes and codes. Several codes could fall under a theme (see table 3). For example, the codes “beatings” and “assaulted” fall under the theme “[physical] violence”. The themes enable us to group the codes. It should be noted that the themes are still codes looked for in documents. The context in which codes have been found will also be considered, meaning that codes will only be counted when they are found in sentences that are specifically discussing pushbacks. In other words, contextualized codes will be counted.

This systematic approach will be supplemented with more in-depth analysis by looking at the meaning behind statements related to the propositions. The meaning behind these sentences will be explained. These statements could be linked to codes, but other arguments that cannot be brought back to codes could also be discussed. Counting codes combined with more in-depth analysis will enable us to test the propositions.

However, propositions C4.1 (populists frame a period as a crisis) and C5.1 (NGOs frame a period as a wealthy one) will not be tested with the coding scheme developed in table 3. Two separate codes have been developed that will be looked for when testing C4.1 and C5.1. For C4.1, the analysis will specifically look for the term “crisis” in the documents of populist actors. On the other hand, for C5.1, a reference to “a wealthy Europe that can provide for suffering refugees” will be looked for in documents of NGOs. Slight variations of these two codes will also be counted.

Table 3: Coding scheme

Propositions	Codes
R1: Security threat discourse	<p><b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b>  [refugees and migrants as a] threat  illegally [entering the country]  [promoting] tough [border policies]  terrorist attacks  wall</p> <p><b>control borders</b>  protect border/defend border  [preserve] security</p>
C1: Victimization discourse	<p><b>victims [of pushbacks]</b>  vulnerable/vulnerability  cruel/hostile  in need/in need for protection [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks]  [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress  human dignity</p> <p><b>[physical] violence</b>  assaulted/abused/attacked/beatings/injuries/shootings</p> <p><b>stripped down of belongings</b></p>
C2: Human rights discourse	<p><b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b>  [pushbacks are] unlawful  [pushbacks are] illegal</p> <p><b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/international law</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b>  regular/organized/normal</p> <p><b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b>  arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure</p> <p><b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b>  ill-treatment/torture/inadequate conditions</p>
C3: National identity discourse	<p><b>[national] identity</b>  tradition</p>

	<p><b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b>          clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity]          Christian identity</p>
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*Note:* Interpretation of the author

#### 4.6 Validity and Reliability

The degree to which the analysis measures what it had intended to measure can be defined as validity (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). There are two types of validity: internal and external validity. Internal validity discusses the degree to which a causal relationship can be demonstrated, whereas external validity considers the generalizability of the research (McDermott, 2011).

Internal validity seems to apply more to causal studies with dependent and independent variables. However, in congruence analysis, internal validity also plays an important role. Researchers could have a confirmation bias, meaning that they search for information that confirms their propositions (biased selectivity). This thesis reduces risks of biased selectivity through triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of various types of sources to improve validity (Robson & McCartan, 2015). Various types of triangulation, including data and theory triangulation, can be used (Robson & McCartan, 2015). The inclusion of statements and documents of three different types of actors is a form of data triangulation, which ensures that varying perspectives are being considered. Internal validity can also be improved by including multiple theoretical approaches (theory triangulation) in the analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2015). The pluralist theoretical framework including multiple IR theories allows for complementary conclusions and is a form of theory triangulation.

As mentioned, external validity refers to the generalizability of research. With congruence analysis, results can generally not be generalized to other cases (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). However, generalization takes place within the theoretical approaches. If either realism or constructivism appears to have more explanatory power in explaining the discourse around pushbacks, generalizable conclusions can be made on which theory can best explain the case. Importantly, it is not necessary that the results of this thesis can be generalized to other cases. Using IR theories to explain an important case, namely the discourse around pushbacks, already has high scientific relevance.

Furthermore, reliability has been defined as the extent to which a measurement gives the same results when carried out multiple times (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). In this thesis, reliability has been ensured in multiple ways. First, the documents included are stable and can be researched multiple times. The documentation will not change after the research has been carried out which contributes to reliability. Moreover, codes will be counted in a systematic way. This can be done multiple times without the results changing.

The choice of the time frame also contributes to internal validity and reliability. This thesis analyzes the discourse around pushbacks from 2019 until 2022. The time frame only covers a couple of years. This time frame has been chosen because the discourse should not change within the time frame,

meaning that the same actors should play a leading role throughout the entire time frame and not change their position drastically. This short time frame ensures that there have not been government changes in either of the countries. In Greece, the last elections were held in July 2019 (Smith, 2019), and no Greek government statements made before the elections have been analyzed. This contributes to internal validity since the analysis will measure what it intends to measure. When a change of government would have taken place within the time frame, this would have negatively impacted internal validity. If an actor changes its opinion in the middle of the time frame, it is unclear what type of discourse this actor produces. This could lead to a situation in which it is not clear whether realism or constructivism can explain the discourse produced in the chosen time frame and the research question cannot be answered.

Moreover, relevant documentation should be discussed, and the longer the time frame, the higher the chance that relevant documentation is missing. Therefore, the shorter time frame contributes to reliability. If another researcher would carry out this research again, the same documents would most likely be selected. The recent time frame also increases information availability. In the last couple of years, considerable international attention has been given to pushbacks (Nielsen, 2021; Tondo, 2021). Documents and statements have been published that can be analyzed.

Lastly, although the results cannot be generalized, the choice to include two different types of governments, namely a conservative and a populist government contributes to external validity. The research question is being applied to two different governments which ensures that the results reflect various types of government.

## 5. Empirical analysis

In this chapter, the outcomes of the analysis will be discussed. The first section will discuss the results of Greece, whereas the second part will examine the case of Hungary. The data will be presented in figures and extracts will be provided to elaborate on the arguments. In the last section, the results of Greece and Hungary will be compared. An overview of all codes identified per actor can be found in Appendix III and IV.

### 5.1 Analysis of Greece

At the beginning of 2020, the Turkish government declared that it would cease to prevent refugees and other migrants from traveling to Europe (Boffey, 2020), and they declared the border to Europe to be open. Turkey stated that the EU had not been adhering to the conditions agreed upon in the 2016 Turkey-EU deal in which Turkey agreed to prevent migrants from traveling to the EU (Boffey, 2020). Besides the tensions that already existed since the 2015 refugee crisis, at the border between Greece and Turkey, this change in Turkish border policy caused additional tension.

#### 5.1.1 Leading discourses and actors

In the first part of the analysis, this thesis will analyze which discourses are most dominant and what actors were leading in the production of these discourses. Several propositions will be tested (R1, R2, C1, C2, C3, C4 & C5).

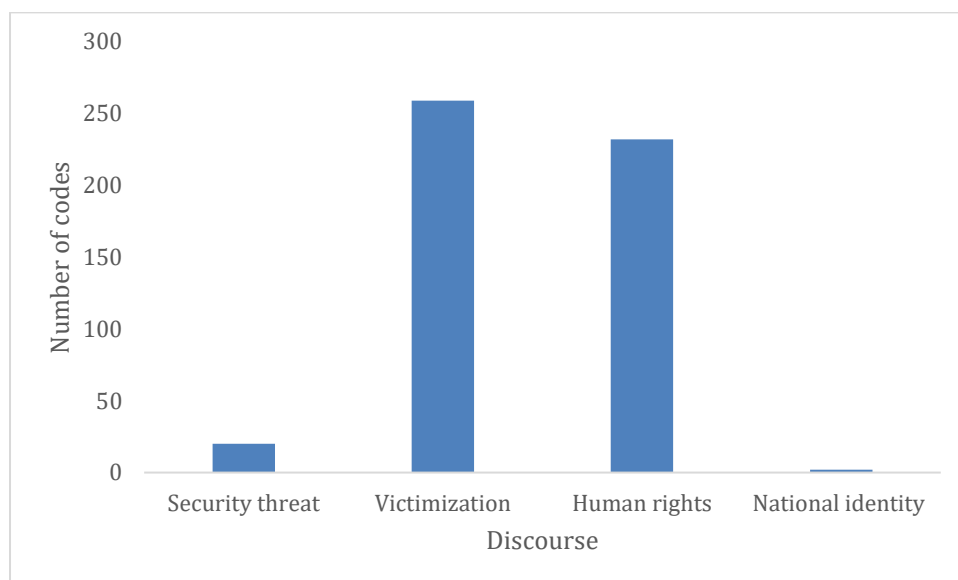


Figure 1: Number of codes per discourse for Greece

Figure 1 shows that the victimization and human rights discourse are leading. Codes related to the victimization and human rights discourse were identified 259 and 232 times respectively, meaning that 95.7 % of all codes identified fall under the humanitarian discourse. Propositions C1 and C2 anticipate the dominance of the victimization and human rights discourse. This thesis concludes that both the



victimization discourse and human rights discourse are dominant. Therefore, support has been found for C1 and C2. At the same time, this means that the security threat discourse and national identity discourse are not dominant. No support has been found for R1 and C3, which predict the dominance of the security threat and national identity discourse. Only two codes related to the national identity discourse have been found. Because of this low number, it almost seems that the national identity discourse was not found at all (see figure 1).

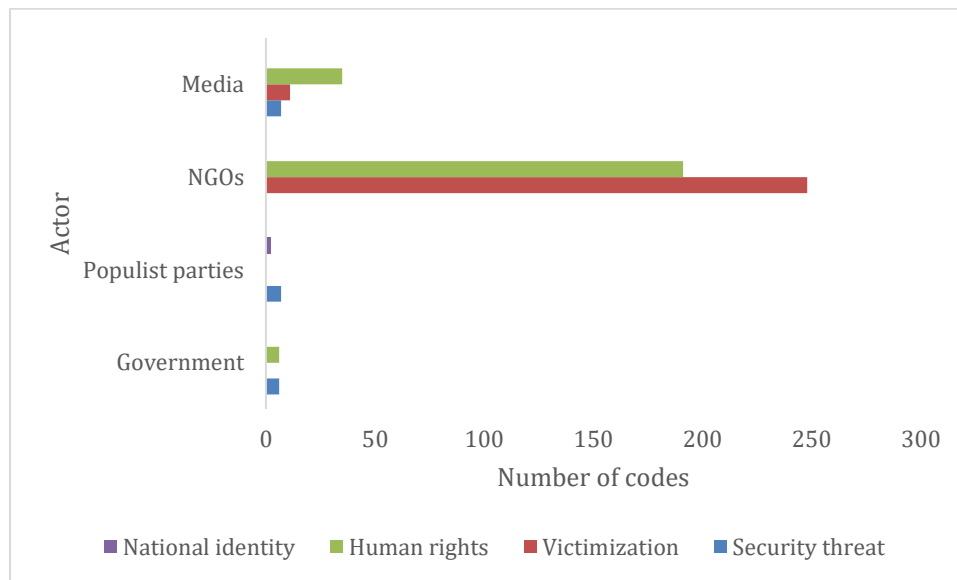


Figure 2: Discourses produced per actor in Greece

When analyzing which actor(s) produced these discourses, this thesis found that NGOs are the dominant actor (see figure 2). From the 513 codes identified across all discourses, 439 were produced by NGOs (85.6%).

Proposition C5 suggests that NGOs will use the humanitarian discourse. Figure 2 shows that 191 codes were identified for the human rights discourse (82.3% of all codes under human rights discourse) and 248 for the victimization discourse (95.8% of all codes under victimization discourse) for NGOs. Given that NGOs have only produced the human rights and victimization discourse, we can conclude that support has been found for C5. On the other hand, C4 states that populist parties will use the national identity discourse. Only three articles were analyzed for populist parties. These articles have been added to complement the discourse produced by the Greek government. All articles analyzed of populist parties included statements of Kyriakos Velopoulos, leader of the populist party Greek Solution. During the last election in 2019, Greek Solution replaced Golden Dawn as the main populist party in Greek politics (Samaris, 2020). In these populist statements, two references have been made to the national identity discourse. This is a low number, but it should be noted that in the articles of populists, only 9 codes were found in total (see figure 2), meaning that barely any statements have been found about pushbacks and the statements that were found did often not support any of the discourses.

“He wants the death penalty for people smugglers, and landmines and electric fences along the Turkish border to keep illegal migrants out — he is starting to find an echo in the mainstream.” (Stamouli, 2019).

“Human traffickers are criminals like pedophiles and drug dealers whose crimes should be punishable by death, Velopoulos said.” (Kambas & Papadimas, 2019).

Although the rhetoric used by Velopoulos is strong and these statements indirectly discuss pushbacks, these statements barely produce any discourse that can be linked back to the themes and codes as laid down in the research design. From these two statements, only the code “illegally [entering the country]” was identified. However, the national identity discourse has been found in the data. Two codes were found covering the national identity discourse (see figure 2), and hostility was expressed towards migrants from other cultural backgrounds. C4 suggests that populists use the national identity discourse. Therefore, support has been found for C4. The sub-propositions of C4 and C5 will be tested in section 5.1.3.

Realist theory expects the government to be the dominant actor in the discourse produced, as laid down in R2. NGOs are the dominant actor, so no support has been found for R2. Since the Greek government has only produced a small number of codes, the sub-propositions of R2 will not be further investigated. In the government statements analyzed, the Greek PM only responds to pushback allegations when being asked a question during a press conference or interview. Responding to a question from a Dutch journalist about pushbacks taking place on Greek territory, the Greek PM stated that

“What I will not accept is that in this office you will insult me or the Greek people with accusations and expressions that are not supported by material facts.” (Reuters, 2022).

This is an example of the PM responding to the pushback allegations. The PM was accused of pushbacks during a press conference, and the PM responds to these allegations. However, the PM does not actively try to discuss pushbacks himself. He only denies the allegations. It seems logical that the government does not produce a lot of documents about pushbacks given that it is being accused of violating international law. The Greek government does not want to focus on this phenomenon. Therefore, only 12 codes have been found for the Greek government (see figure 2), and the government is not the dominant actor.

### **5.1.2 Framing**

To develop a better understanding of the frames used by these actors, the sub-propositions of R1, C1, C2, and C3 will be tested in the following section. These sub-propositions discuss the frames used under

the security threat (R1), victimization (C1), human rights (C2), and national identity (C3) discourse. Although this thesis concluded that the security threat and national identity discourse are not the dominant discourses, they have still been identified and frames have been used. They contributed to the overall discourse. Therefore, the sub-propositions of R1 and C3 will briefly be tested. However, since the victimization discourse and human rights discourse are the leading discourses, special attention will be given to the codes identified under these discourses. The frames used under these leading discourses will be analyzed in the sub-propositions of C1 and C2.

First, the sub-propositions of R1 will be tested. R1.1 suggests that pushbacks will be justified, framing refugees as a threat to the European population, whereas R1.2 anticipates that pushbacks will be justified, framing refugees as intruders that do not respect the sovereignty of European citizens. Since both R1.1 and R1.2 focus on the justification of pushbacks, these propositions will be discussed in one section.

Discourse justifying pushbacks has only been identified in statements produced by the populist party Greek Solution. This populist party has expressed hostility towards refugees and other migrants. In the following extract, these anti-migration ideas are clearly visible.

“First off, I would put a wall up on Evros, with mines,” said Velopoulos of the river that forms a natural border between Turkey and Greece. “I couldn’t care less what Europe says. I will protect my borders for one reason and one reason only, because I’m in danger from Turkey.” (Kambas & Papapdimas, 2019).

Velopoulos refers to using mines to prevent refugees and other migrants from reaching Greek territory. This is extreme language that falls under far-right rhetoric. Velopoulos says that “I’m in danger” (Kambas & Papapdimas, 2019), meaning that Greece is in danger, and the border must be protected. This way refugees and migrants are framed as a threat (R1.1). At the same time, refugees are portrayed as intruders that must be pushed back (R1.2), since these migrants are coming from Turkey and “illegally” enter Greek territory. With these statements, Velopoulos justifies pushbacks. For the populist party Greek Solution, support has been found for R1.1 and R1.2.

On the other hand, R1.3 suggests that the discourse around pushbacks focuses on border security. Although the Greek government does not justify pushbacks and actively denies pushbacks are taking place on Greek territory (Daily Sabah, 2020), the government focuses on border security and national order in its responses. In a response from the Greek government to the Council of Europe about the pushback allegations, the Greek government stated that

In the beginning of 2020 Greece faced a sudden and organized attempt of thousands of persons to enter illegally into Greek and European territory. This massive and coordinated movement

of people constituted a grave and asymmetrical threat to Greece and the EU in all its aspects. (Hellenic Republic, 2021).

The Greek government refers to migrants as a threat. The government does not acknowledge that this threat led to pushbacks, but this quote illustrates the way Greece perceives the movement of people to its territory. Border control should be in place to deal with this inflow of people because they are unwanted. Since the previous section has shown that populist parties also focus on border control, support has been found for R1.3 for the Greek government and populist parties. Interestingly, figure 2 shows that the media produces different discourses, including the security threat discourse. In these instances, the media repeats an argument of the Greek PM about the importance of border control and reflects on these arguments. Although it is only a small part of the discourse produced, support for R1.3 has also been found in media articles.

Since the security threat discourse is closely related to the national identity discourse, the sub-proposition of the national identity discourse will be analyzed before diving into the humanitarian discourse. C3.1 predicts that pushbacks will be justified because refugees form a threat to Europe's cultural heritage. Besides the focus on border control, the populist party Greek Solution has also been vocal about the need to protect Greece from Islam.

“I know it's probably not your style, but this picture depicts the clash of the two civilizations: Christianity and Islam,” he said.” (Stamouli, 2019).

This quote of Velopoulos presents the argument that Christianity and Islam cannot co-exist and, therefore, refugees and other migrants cannot be allowed to enter Greek territory. This will lead to a “clash of civilizations” (Stamouli, 2019). However, this reference has only been found twice, meaning that C3.1 forms only a small part of the overall discourse. In other words, the frames used under the security threat and national identity discourse have been found, however, because they are not part of the dominant humanitarian discourse, they only play a complementary role in the overall discourse produced.

Since the victimization discourse is one of the leading discourses, this thesis will take a closer look at the codes identified within this discourse. Proposition C1.1 discusses that refugees will be framed as victims of pushbacks. Within the coding scheme of the victimization discourse, the codes have been divided into three main themes (see table 3 in research design). Figure 3 shows that the theme “[physical] violence” was identified 166 times. This is 64% of all codes identified under the victimization discourse. As mentioned (figure 2), most of this discourse was produced by NGOs. More specifically, 95.8% of the victimization discourse was produced by NGOs. The other 4.2% was produced by the media which reinforced the arguments of NGOs.

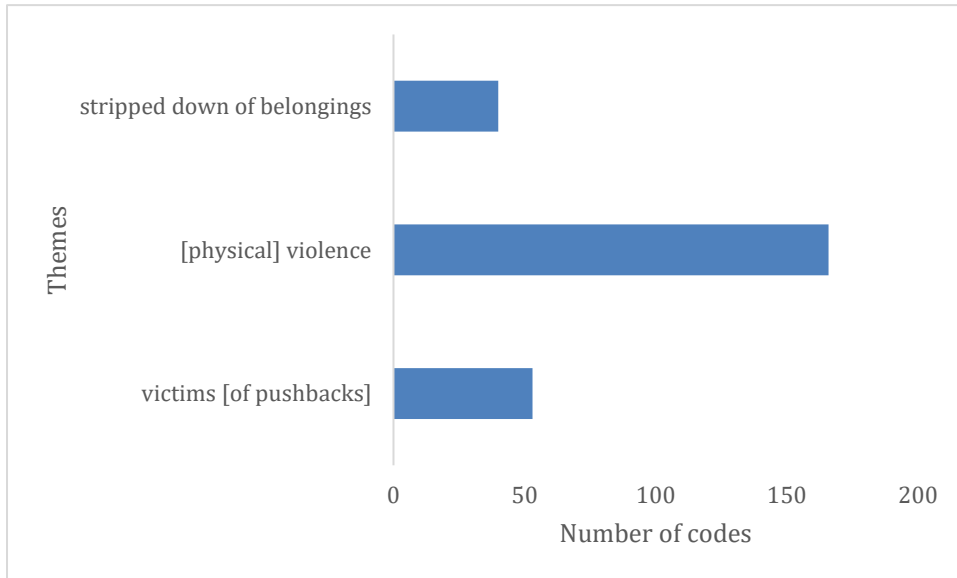


Figure 3: Number of codes per theme in the victimization discourse for Greece

In NGO reports, personal stories in which refugees and other migrants describe the harm done to them were included. In these stories, the emphasis was often on “beatings”, “shootings” and “attacks” (these are examples of codes). This way references to different forms of “[physical] violence” were made. An example included in a report written by HRM has been provided in the following extract.

“They [Greek security forces] tried to search my wife and touched her breasts,” said a Syrian man who was travelling with his wife and children. “Then they tried to take off her headscarf and her trousers. When I tried to stop them, they beat me really badly with their fists, feet, a heavy plastic rod, and a metal stick. They hit my 2-year-old daughter with a heavy plastic stick on the head so that she still has a bruise.” (HRW, 2020b).

The helplessness of migrants has been emphasized in this extract. The woman was sexually assaulted, and her husband was beaten only because he wanted to prevent it from happening. The reports contain many similar stories, which stress the magnitude of this phenomenon. Because many similar stories are included, many codes have been found in NGO reports. NGOs highlight the same arguments repeatedly.

Another aspect emphasized is that migrants were stripped down of their belongings. The theme “stripped down of belongings” was found 40 times, which is 15.4% of all codes identified under the victimization discourse.

As the men forced us on the trucks, they told all of us men to take off our clothes, except for our underwear. They beat the men who didn’t want to strip. Then they took us to the river and forced us onto inflatable boats back to Turkey. (HRW, 2020b).

Sometimes migrants were completely naked when they were being pushed back. This shows the vulnerability of migrants. Moreover, in 20.5% of all codes identified under the victimization discourse, migrants were framed as “victims [of pushbacks]” who need protection. With the focus on migrants as victims combined with an emphasis on violence and migrants being robbed of their possessions, support has been found for C1.1 (refugees are framed as victims of pushbacks).

Clearly, all people were subject to severe degrading treatment, which is a human rights violation. Proposition C2.1 anticipates that pushbacks will be framed as an illegal practice and a violation of human rights.

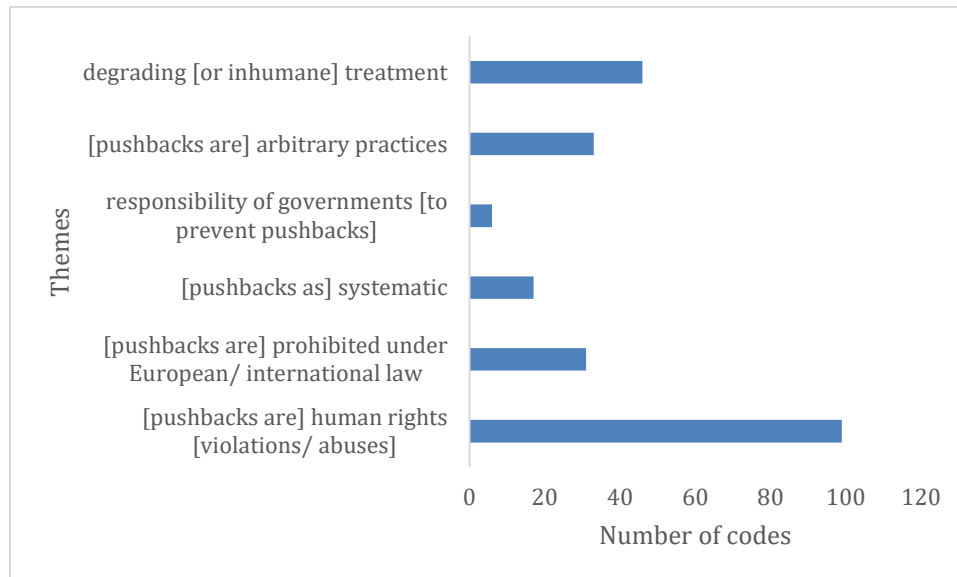


Figure 4: Number of codes per theme in the human rights discourse for Greece

As can be seen in figure 2, the human rights discourse was produced by NGOs, the media, and the Greek government. Naturally, NGOs produced the most discourse related to human rights, namely 82.3%. Figure 4 shows that the theme “[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]” has been identified 99 times, which is 42.7% of all codes identified under the human rights discourse. However, the other themes that fall under the human rights discourse should also be touched upon. These remaining codes were more evenly spread over the other themes (see figure 4).

“I have the feeling that everyone thinks pushbacks are a normal procedure for protecting the border. I think they have lost the measure of what is legal and what is not.” (Amnesty International, 2021).

In this extract, Amnesty International (2021) argues that pushbacks have become a “normal” practice. The code “[pushbacks as] normal” falls under the theme “[pushbacks as] systematic”, which was identified 17 times. This is 7.3% of all codes identified under the human rights discourse. The theme came back in various NGO reports. According to NGOs, the way refugees and migrants are being

arrested, detained, and pushed back seems to be a structured procedure that border guards are used to carrying out.

Moreover, the media produced 5 codes falling under the “[pushbacks as] systematic” theme, meaning that the media also engaged with this argument. In other words, the media produced the human rights discourse (15.1% of all codes under human rights discourse). They repeat the rhetoric used by NGOs and spread this rhetoric to a broader public. Besides NGOs, international institutions such as the UN, are given a platform in newspaper articles. International institutions adopt a similar discourse as NGOs. For example, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, stated that

“What is happening at European borders is legally and morally unacceptable and must stop.”  
(EurActiv with AFP, 2022).

Furthermore, although the Greek government focuses on border control, it also emphasizes that pushbacks are prohibited under international law (Daily Sabah, 2020). This way the Greek government touches upon the human rights discourse. However, the government only produced 2.6% of all codes identified under the human rights discourse.

C2.1 suggests that pushbacks were framed as an illegal practice and human rights violation. Since pushbacks were often literally framed as a human rights violation (see figure 4), strong support has been found for C2.1.

### **5.1.3 Framing of time periods**

In this section, the sub-propositions of C4 and C5 will be tested. C4.1 lays down that populist politicians will frame pushbacks as an adequate response in times of crisis, whereas C5.1 anticipates that NGOs frame pushbacks as a human rights violation in a time in which the EU is capable of supporting people in need. In the documents analyzed, references to a time of crisis have not been identified. Populist politicians of Greek Solution do not refer to a national crisis to justify that refugees must be pushed back. Besides framing migrants as a physical and cultural threat, the populist statements analyzed did not argue that Greece goes through a crisis and, therefore, must push back refugees. Although statements of populist leader Velopoulos state that “I’m in danger from Turkey” (Kambas & Papadimas, 2019), this danger seems not to come from a crisis. The code “crisis” was not found. Therefore, C4.1 is not supported. Furthermore, NGOs have not framed the time period we are currently living in as a reason to condemn pushbacks. NGOs stress that pushbacks should never take place. The time period is not connected to this ideology. The code “a wealthy Europe that can provide for suffering refugees” was not identified. Hence, C5.1 is not supported.

## 5.2 Analysis of Hungary

At the end of 2020, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) declared that Hungary had failed to adhere to EU law which prohibits summary deportations. After the 2015 refugee crisis, Hungary adapted its migration legislation on the rules around returning irregular migrants (EC, 2021). The legislation created transit zones at the Serbian border. All refugees arriving were placed in these zones, and they were not allowed to leave. The CJEU ruled that a substantial part of this migration legislation infringes EU law (CJEU, 2020). Consequently, the Hungarian government asked the Constitutional Court of Hungary to rule on the connection between EU law and the Hungarian Fundamental Law (EurActiv with Reuters, 2021). This way the Hungarian government tried to undermine the CJEU's ruling. The Constitutional Court presented an inconsistent judgment that could be claimed by both sides. The Hungarian government claimed that the judgment laid down the right of Hungary to make its migration laws, whereas civil society argued that this judgment proved the supremacy of EU law and made it clear that the CJEU judgment should be implemented (EurActiv with Reuters, 2021).

### 5.2.1 Leading discourses and actors

In the following section, this thesis will investigate what discourses are leading and what the dominant actors are (R1, R2, C1, C2, C3, C4, and C5).

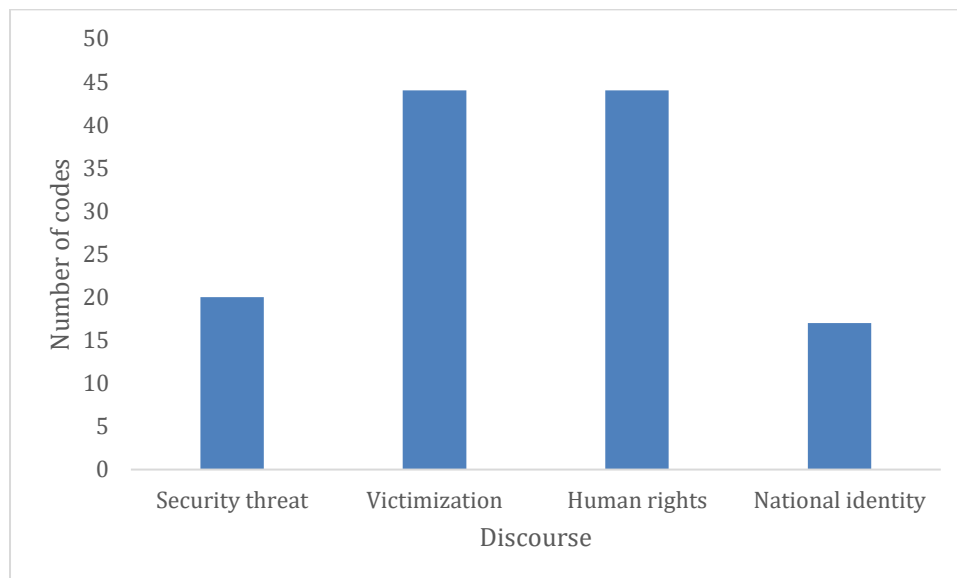


Figure 5: Number of codes per discourse for Hungary

What becomes clear from figure 5 is that the discourse produced for Hungary provides a more balanced picture between the four discourses, compared to Greece. The victimization and human rights discourse are still leading, but the security threat and national identity discourse also receive attention here. Propositions C1 and C2 expect, respectively, the victimization and human rights discourse to be dominant. Although figure 5 provides a more balanced picture, support has been found for C1 and C2 only, meaning that the victimization and human rights discourse are dominant. Specifically, the



victimization and human rights discourse form 70.4% of all discourse produced. The same number of codes was found for the victimization and human rights discourse, namely 44 codes. R1 and C3 predict the security threat and national identity discourse to be dominant. However, looking at figure 5, we can see that no support has been found for R1 and C3. Interestingly, fewer codes have been identified for this case. For Hungary, 125 codes have been identified across all discourses, compared to 513 for Greece.

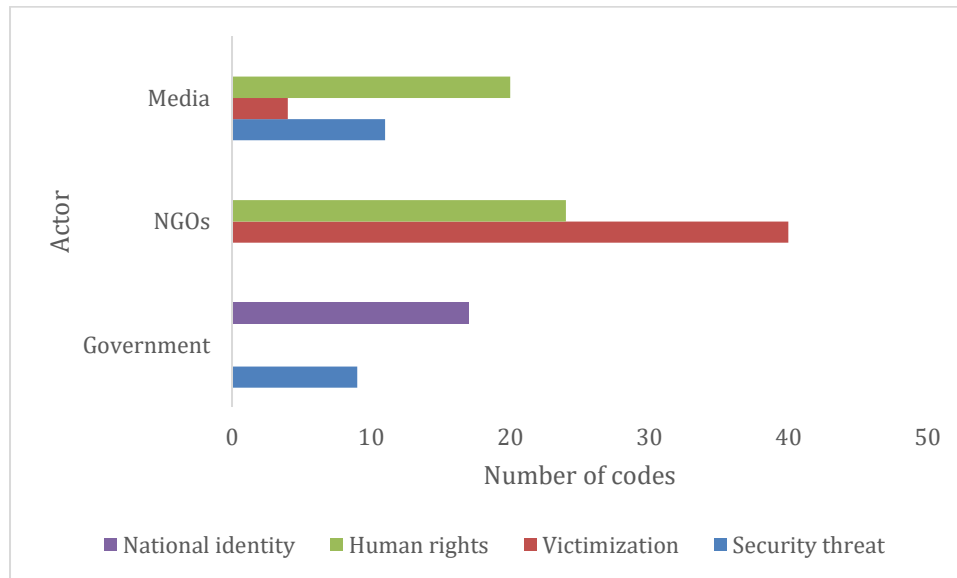


Figure 6: Discourses produced per actor for Hungary

When analyzing which actor(s) produced these discourses, it becomes clear what actor caused the difference in number of codes identified. NGOs only produced 64 codes for Hungary (51.2% of all codes identified), compared to 439 for Greece. The media produced 35 codes (28%), and the Hungarian government 26 codes (20.8%). Thus, although NGOs in Hungary produced fewer codes, compared to Greece, they are still the dominant actor. In the case of Hungary, populist parties were not included as a separate actor which could be a reason that fewer codes have been found. However, in Greece, this actor barely produced any codes. Moreover, in Hungary, actors produced fewer documents and statements covering pushbacks and the documents published by NGOs were often much shorter. In other words, data availability was lower for Hungary. Consequently, fewer codes were identified for Hungary. In the following part, propositions specifically about actors will be tested.

Proposition C5 predicts that NGOs will use the humanitarian discourse. Figure 6 shows that NGOs produced 24 codes for the human rights discourse (54.5% of all codes under human rights discourse) and 40 for the victimization discourse (90.9% of all codes under victimization discourse). Support has been found for C5. Furthermore, C4 predicts that populist parties use the national identity discourse. In Hungary, the government is of populist nature (Ilonszki & Vajda, 2021). Therefore, this proposition will be tested by analyzing the Hungarian government. The government has produced 17

codes related to the national identity discourse (see figure 6), meaning that support has been found for C4.

Realism suggests that national governments will be leading in the discourse produced, as laid down in R2. NGOs are the leading actor (see figure 6). Hence, the government cannot be dominant, and no support has been found for R2. However, since the government produced quite some discourse (20.8% of all codes identified), the role of the Hungarian government should not be neglected. To compare, the Greek government only produced 2.3% (see figure 2). Therefore, the sub-propositions of R2 will be tested in section 5.2.4 to investigate the expectations of realism regarding the role of the state.

### **5.2.2 Framing**

In the following section, the frames used by societal actors will be analyzed. The sub-propositions that will be discussed analyze the frames used under the security threat (R1), victimization (C1), human rights (C2), and national identity (C3) discourse. Special attention will be given to the frames used under the human rights and victimization discourse since these frames cover the leading discourses. First, this section will test the sub-propositions of R1. R1.1 suggests that pushbacks will be justified by framing refugees as a threat to the European population. Moreover, R1.2 anticipates that pushbacks will be justified, framing refugees as intruders that do not respect the sovereignty of European citizens. Both propositions focus on the justification of pushbacks.

The government engages in the security threat discourse (see figure 6). Hungarian legislation even allows for pushbacks to take place. In the following extract, the official language used in Hungarian legislation has been laid down.

“In Hungarian officialese, the pushbacks are called “escort of apprehended illegal migrants to a gate opening of the Provisional Border Security Barrier (IBH).” ” (DW, 2021).

After refugees are picked up, they should directly be deported to the border with Serbia. At the border, there is a fence. Refugees and other migrants are forced to go through a gate in that fence and must enter Serbian territory. Responding to the 2020 CJEU ruling, Orbán stated that he will not change his border policy.

“We decided that we will not do anything to change the way the border is protected,” Orbán said. “We won’t change it and we aren’t going to let anyone in.” (Euronews with AP, 2021).

The PM of Hungary is not trying to present a nuanced opinion. Hungary will not take in “any” refugees and other migrants. Orbán even highlighted that terrorist attacks are a direct consequence of migration movements toward Hungary (Gorondi, 2019). Therefore, the frame of migrants as a threat is important

(R1.1). At the same time, the Hungarian government aims to protect its sovereignty from intruders whom it will not let into the country (R1.2). In the discourse presented in national legislation and speeches given by Orbán, pushbacks are being justified. Therefore, support has been found for R1.1 and R1.2 for the Hungarian government.

Proposition R1.3 suggests that the discourse around pushbacks will focus on border security. The discourse produced by the government is focused on border control. Furthermore, although pushbacks were not being justified in the media, voices in favor of border control received attention in the news. This can be seen in an article by Barigazzi, published in *Politico*.

“Notably, the 12-country coalition references the need “to adapt the existing legal framework to the new realities” in its letter.” (Barigazzi, 2021b).

In this article, *Politico* considers the arguments of pro-pushback forces (Barigazzi, 2021b). The article mentions that there is a willingness to adapt the EU framework to “new realities” (Barigazzi, 2021b), which implies that pushbacks should be legalized. By adding that 12 countries are involved in this coalition, the magnitude of the forces in favor of pushbacks is described. It is not only Orbán who is in favor of it. Orbán’s arguments have spread to other countries, but Orbán was one of the first leaders to talk extensively about walls and keeping migrants out of the EU (Barigazzi, 2021b). Therefore, support has been found for R1.3 for the media and the Hungarian government.

The security threat discourse and national identity discourse are both part of the securitization discourse. Therefore, the sub-proposition of the national identity discourse will be discussed now. C3.1 predicts that pushbacks will be justified because refugees form a threat to Europe’s cultural heritage. The national identity discourse was only used by the Hungarian government (see figure 6). The reason for Orbán’s strict border policy is the “shrinking Christian proportions” in multicultural countries (Al Jazeera, 2019). According to Orbán, when many Muslim immigrants settle in Christian countries, the native population loses its national identity. Muslims will take over the country and the culture will change. By referring to “shrinking Christian proportions”, he implies that he does not want a mixed Hungarian population. He wants a purely Christian European population. He even stated that “we want Hungarian babies” (Al Jazeera, 2019). Even if migrants integrate into Hungarian society, and assimilate culturally, this is not enough. According to Orbán, they form a clear threat to the country’s culture. Therefore, support has been found for C3.1. It should be noted that although the frames of the security threat and national identity discourse have been found, these frames are not part of the dominant discourses and are only complementary to the overall discourse produced.

The frames used under the victimization and human rights discourse will receive more attention since these are the leading discourses. Proposition C1.1 predicts that pushbacks will be condemned by framing refugees as victims of pushbacks.

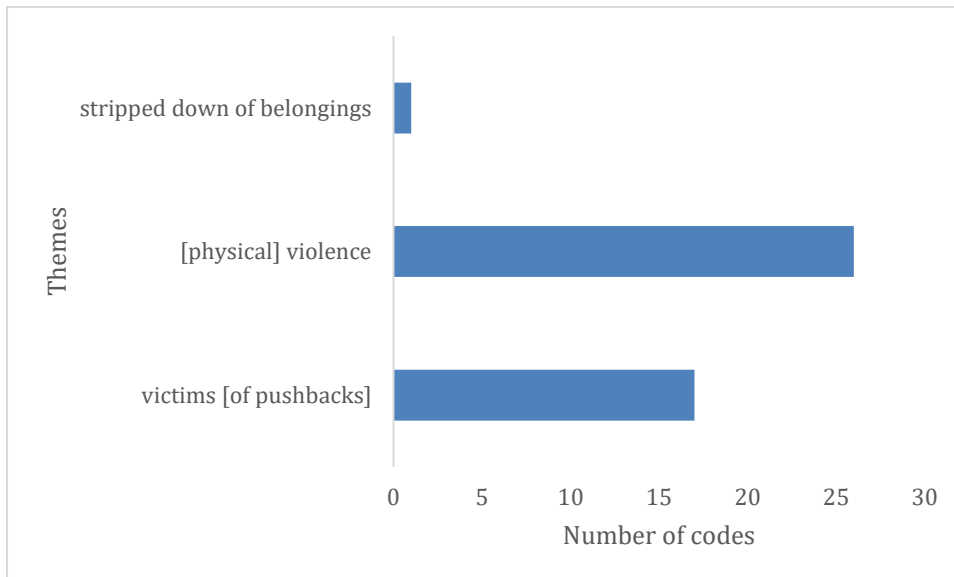


Figure 7: Number of codes per theme in the victimization discourse for Hungary

Figure 7 shows that “[physical] violence” forms 59.1% of all codes identified under the victimization discourse. The theme “victims [of pushbacks]” was also found often, namely, it forms 38.6% of all codes identified under the victimization discourse. Interestingly, the theme “stripped down of belongings” was only found once, meaning that in Hungary this was not a focus in the discourse produced. As figure 6 shows, most of the victimization discourse was produced by NGOs, namely 90.9%. The other 9.1% was produced by the media. Therefore, NGOs will be the focus of this discussion.

In NGO articles about pushbacks in Hungary, the personal stories of refugees and other migrants were emphasized less often than in Greece. Quotes of refugees directly telling their stories were often not part of the articles. They mostly contained statements from NGO representatives about pushbacks. These articles were not written as research, but as news articles with an advocacy purpose.

In our personal experience, these often very brutal beatings do not prevent foreigners from trying to cross the border again and again. Therefore, from a cynical expediency point of view, police violence has no deterrent effect either: it is unbridled sadism, nothing else. (HHC, 2021d).

In this extract, the HHC responds to the argument presented that these beatings would scare refugees away and, therefore, serve a purpose. However, the HHC states that migrants will try to cross the border again and again despite the beatings. Often refugees and other migrants do not feel they have the choice to move back. The HHC refers to a vicious cycle of pushbacks constantly taking place. These people cannot go back to a country at war. They will keep trying which makes them the ultimate victims. In

the media, the victimization discourse was also touched upon. From the discussion above, we can conclude that support has been found for C1.1.

In addition, C2.1 anticipates that pushbacks will be condemned because they are a violation of human rights and, therefore, an illegal practice.

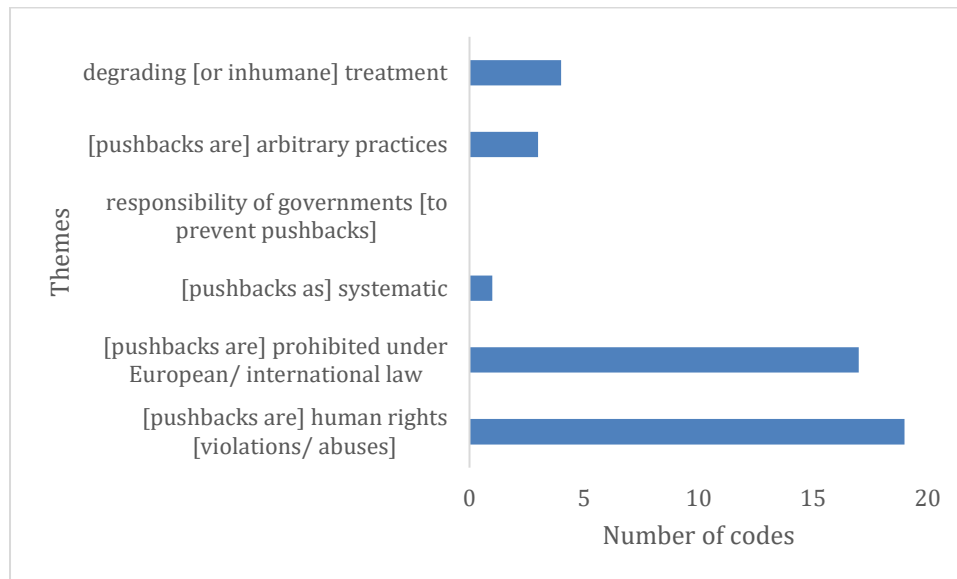


Figure 8: Number of codes per theme in the human rights discourse for Hungary

As can be seen in figure 6, the human rights discourse was produced by NGOs and the media. NGOs produced 54.5% of the discourse and the media 45.5%. The discourse was almost evenly distributed across these two actors.

Figure 8 shows that codes related to “[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]” and “[pushbacks are] prohibited under European/international law” have been identified the most, namely 19 and 17 times respectively (43.2% and 38.6%). The other themes were found only a few times, and “responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]” was not found at all. Interestingly, “[pushbacks as] systematic” is not a frame that was used in the discourse of NGOs. The theme was only found once in a newspaper article (see Appendix IV), meaning that NGOs in Hungary do not highlight that pushbacks are taking place in a structured manner.

The unpunished, state-instigated police arbitrariness is a peculiarity of police states and extraneous to the rule of law. Unjustified violence and concealment of violence are toxic to the functioning of the police. Let us not forget that the police, who are left without control at the border, also take action against us, against Hungarian citizens. (HHC, 2021d).

In this extract, the HHC refers to the practices as a violation of the rule of law. At the same time, the extract shows that the HHC appeals to Hungarian citizens. Specifically, the HHC talks directly to the Hungarian people to convince them that violence against migrants is a problem. If the police use arbitrary violence against migrants, what prevents them from using violence against the Hungarian

population. This way the HHC calls upon citizens to undertake action against this violation of international law. The focus on legality is also visible in newspaper articles. The following extract quotes the chair of the European Stability Initiative, Gerald Knaus. He emphasizes the importance of compliance with EU law.

“The problem is not a wall, the problem is the EU law applied at borders” he argued. “And what I feel would be a constructive way in this debate is to say that the European Commission can fund all aspects of border protection, which are legal, but only if it is verifiably true that EU law is being applied at the border.” (Barigazzi, 2021b).

Both NGOs and the media frame pushbacks as human rights violations. Therefore, support has been found for C2.1.

### **5.2.3 Framing of time periods**

In this section, the sub-propositions of C4 and C5 will be tested. C4.1 states that populist politicians will frame pushbacks as an adequate response in times of crisis. On the other hand, C5.1 suggests that NGOs will frame pushbacks as a human rights violation in a time in which the EU is capable of supporting people in need. First, no reference to a time of crisis has been made in the documents. The right-wing populist government does not refer to a time of crisis to justify pushbacks. Therefore, no support has been found for C4.1. Furthermore, NGOs in Hungary did not frame the time period we are currently living in as a reason why pushbacks should not take place. Like Greece, NGOs stress that pushbacks should not take place under any circumstances. Therefore, no support has been found for C5.1.

### **5.2.4 Orbán: calling the shots**

The international media supports various discourses and gives a voice to different actors. However, the government is controlling most of the national media. Although media are not directly state-owned, Orbán ensured that platforms were taken over by oligarchs supportive of his government. Griffen (2020) argued that the Hungarian government has broken down free media and reached a high level of information control. In 2020, around 80 percent of political news in Hungary was financed by actors friendly to Orbán’s government (Griffen, 2020). This thesis already concluded that no support has been found for R2 (which suggests that the government is the dominant actor), meaning that the government has not been presented as the dominant actor in the amount of discourse produced. However, since the Hungarian government produced 20.8% of all discourse produced (compared to 2.3% by the Greek government), this thesis will look further into the role of the Hungarian state. The analysis already concluded that the government produced the security threat discourse, which falls under realism. Moreover, the government is of right-wing populist nature and there is no press freedom. The political

ideology of the government and the discourse it produces make it interesting to dive deeper into the expectations of realism.

The sub-propositions of R2 will be tested. Since in the analysis of Greece the sub-propositions of R2 were not tested, the analysis of Hungary deviates here from the analysis of Greece. R2.1 suggests that national governments will emphasize the sovereignty of the nation-state. Responding to the CJEU judgment, the Hungarian government continuously emphasized that it will not implement the judgment (DW, 2021). The Hungarian government argued that it has the right to make its migration laws. Hence, the Hungarian government emphasized its sovereignty. Support has been found for R2.1. Moreover, R2.2 anticipates that national governments will justify pushbacks by referring to the need to protect their citizens. The security threat discourse came back regularly in the government statements analyzed, as expected by realism. The idea that the government must protect its citizens against an external threat underlies most of the discourse produced. For example, Orbán referred to terrorist attacks as a consequence of migration movements (Gorondi, 2019). Therefore, support has been found for R2.2.

Lastly, R2.3 predicts that non-governing parties will not be leading in the discourse around pushbacks. NGOs are the leading actor. However, although NGOs produce the most discourse, it is unclear whether this discourse is also the most influential in society. The government controls most of the media and, therefore, the government seems to be an influential actor. However, analyzing the impact of the government's discourse goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Since this thesis investigates the amount of discourse produced, this thesis concludes that no support has been found for R2.3. The government emphasizes its own sovereignty and frames migrants as a threat, but non-governing parties, such as NGOs, produce the most discourse. Given that two of the three sub-propositions have been supported, this thesis concludes that the discourse produced by the government reflects a realist way of thinking, but NGOs are still the dominant actor which was not expected by realism.

### **5.3 Greece and Hungary compared**

For both Greece and Hungary, NGOs are the dominant actor in the production of discourse. NGOs produced most codes. However, for Greece, NGOs produced much more codes than for Hungary (439 and 64 respectively). In the case of Greece, extensive reports were written with tens of pages, while for Hungary, often only shorter articles were published by NGOs. This ensured that for the analysis of Greece much more codes were identified than for Hungary, meaning that the body of overall discourse produced was larger for Greece. Because NGOs are the leading actor in both countries, the victimization and human rights discourse form the leading discourses.

In Greece, pushbacks were presented as a systematic practice by NGOs, whereas, in Hungary, this theme was only found once (in a media article). Furthermore, the codes were more evenly distributed across actors in Hungary. In Greece, NGOs produced 85.6% of all codes identified, and in Hungary, this was only 51.2%. In Hungary, the government produced more discourse, compared to the Greek government which mainly responded to the allegations and denied pushbacks. The denial does

not support a specific discourse, and, therefore, fewer codes were found. In Hungary, the government produced the security threat and national identity discourse, while the Greek government engaged with the security threat and human rights discourse. Lastly, for both Greece and Hungary, the media touched upon various discourses. The international media gave voice to different actors.



## **6. Discussion of findings**

In this chapter, the propositions will be discussed, contributions to the literature will be laid down, and some of the findings will be elaborated upon.

### **6.1 Discussion of propositions**

The analysis has discussed various propositions. Tables 4 and 5 show whether these propositions have been supported (Y) or not (N). Table 4 illustrates that for both Greece and Hungary the victimization and the human rights discourse are the dominant discourses. For clarity reasons, the sub-propositions of R1, C1, C2, and C3 have not been included in the table. The sub-propositions discussed the frames which could be found under the four main discourses (R1.1, R1.2, R1.3, C1.1, C2.1 & C3.1). All frames have been identified in the analysis, meaning that support has been found for all sub-propositions. Not only the frames used under the victimization and human rights discourse have been identified but also the frames used under the security threat and national identity discourse. However, the frames under the leading discourses have been identified much more often than the frames used under the security threat and national identity discourse. Therefore, in the analysis, the frames used under the leading discourses received most attention.

When analyzing which actor(s) produced these discourses, NGOs are the leading actor in both cases. Moreover, support has been found for C5, meaning that NGOs use the humanitarian discourse (see table 5). In fact, NGOs produced most of the humanitarian discourse. Moreover, support was found for C4, meaning that populist parties use the national identity discourse. Since NGOs are the dominant actor in the amount of discourse produced, national governments cannot be leading, and no support has been found for R2. Because the Hungarian government produced relatively more discourse, compared to Greece, the sub-propositions of R2 were tested for Hungary (and not for Greece). The sub-propositions discussed whether the government emphasized its sovereignty (R2.1) and justified pushbacks referring to the need to protect its citizens (R2.2). The last sub-proposition laid down that non-governing actors will not be leading in the discourse produced (R2.3). Support was found for R2.1 and R2.2 for Hungary. However, since NGOs are leading, no support was found for R2.3. The last sub-propositions that should be discussed are C4.1, which states that populist politicians frame pushbacks as an adequate response in times of crisis, and C5.1, which suggests that NGOs frame pushbacks as a human rights violation in a time in which the EU is capable of supporting people in need. Both these propositions were not supported for both cases, meaning that both populists and NGOs did not frame the period we are currently living in as a reason to justify or condemn pushbacks.

Table 4: Findings of dominant discourses

<b>Propositions</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
R1: Security threat discourse	N	N
C1: Victimization discourse	Y	Y
C2: Human rights discourse	Y	Y
C3: National identity discourse	N	N

*Note:* Findings based on analysis (Y=Yes/N=No)

Table 5: Findings of actors

<b>Propositions</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
R2: National government as leading actor	N	N
C4: Populists use national identity discourse	Y	Y
C5: NGOs use humanitarian discourse	Y	Y

*Note:* Findings based on analysis (Y=Yes/N=No)

## **6.2 Literature: normalization of pushbacks and populism**

Gatta (2019), Koros (2021) and Lang and Nagy (2021) argue that pushbacks have become a normalized practice. The discourse produced by NGOs and media in Greece aligns with the arguments of these academics, meaning that the arguments of these academics are being spread through the discourse of NGOs and media. In Hungary, the theme “[pushbacks as] systematic” was not found in the discourse of NGOs (only one code in a newspaper article). In other words, the arguments of Gatta (2019), Koros (2021), and Lang and Nagy (2021) were spread in Greece, but not in Hungary. However, in Greece, normalization only came back in the discourse produced by NGOs and media. Other actors did not engage with this argument. NGOs might produce most of the discourse, a normalizing trend must be picked up by a variety of actors. Thus, although the observations of academics might be factually correct and pushbacks are occurring frequently, a normalizing trend is only partly reflected in the discourse produced. In Greece part of the actors engaged with this argument, but for Hungary this theme was almost non-existent.

Although NGOs are the dominant actor in the discourse produced, this does not mean that their discourse is also the most impactful. This thesis investigated the frequency of codes to determine the leading discourses and actors. NGOs produced the most discourse. However, the impact of each actor and discourse was not analyzed. It is unclear whether the discourse produced by NGOs was also the most impactful in the public sphere. This thesis found that international media often give a voice to NGO representatives which would point to the victimization and human rights discourse being heard. Nevertheless, the observation that pushbacks are still taking place emphasizes that NGO advocacy work does not have the desired result yet. NGOs might produce most of the discourse, but this does not mean that they are also influential in changing the situation.

The literature expects populist politicians to express hostility towards refugees (Van Kessel, 2015). Under constructivism, a proposition was developed that suggested that populists would use the national identity discourse (C4). In the analysis of populist actors, hostility was identified in the discourse, confirming the findings of academics. The populist party Greek Solution and the Hungarian populist government justify pushbacks in their discourse. Hostility was expressed through both the national identity and security threat discourse. Populists used the national identity discourse, as expected by constructivism. Moreover, although non-governing actors are not considered under realism, the security threat discourse was used by populists which is a discourse that falls under realism. In other words, frames falling under realism were used by populist actors.

### **6.3 Differences between cases**

Hungary and Greece have been included as case studies because pushbacks take place in both countries. Another reason why they were included is that they have different types of governments, namely a right-wing populist (Ilonszki and Vajda, 2021), and a center-right conservative government (Smith, 2019). A difference in response between these two governments was expected (see research design). In the analysis, this difference was found. The Greek government emphasized that border control was a necessity but that human rights should be respected. In other words, pushbacks should not take place. On the other hand, the Hungarian government stressed that it will not “let anyone in” (Euronews with AP, 2021) implying that pushbacks are a necessity. The literature expects that populist actors will use anti-migration rhetoric (Van Kessel, 2015). The Hungarian government constantly emphasized that it will not host any refugees because these refugees would endanger the population, which is a clear example of such anti-migration rhetoric. The Hungarian government has proven to be a populist actor in the discourse around pushbacks. On the contrary, the Greek government expresses concerns regarding the large number of refugees and does not want to host all these people, but also acknowledges its human rights obligations. This fits with the government’s conservative ideology. There is a clear difference between the responses of the two governments which is connected to the difference in ideology.

Interestingly, in the analysis of Greece, many more codes were found, compared to Hungary. Several elaborate NGO reports written about pushbacks in Greece (partially) caused this difference in number of codes. NGOs in Greece produced 439 codes. Reflecting on the situation in Greece, we could have expected that NGOs would publish extensively on pushbacks in this country. Namely, international attention for Greek border policy already began to increase during the 2015 refugee crisis when around 1 million refugees and other migrants arrived in Greece (EC, 2016). The country was overwhelmed with the unprecedented number of arrivals, and NGOs and international institutions began to scrutinize how Greece dealt with the situation (Oxfam International, n.d.; Spindler, 2015). Because NGOs are already focusing on Greece since 2015, it seems logical that extensive reports have also been written about pushbacks in Greece today.

As discussed, data availability was lower for Hungary. Compared to Greece, fewer and shorter documents were published by NGOs in Hungary. The Hungarian political system, with its right-wing populist government, most likely had an impact on this. There is no press freedom (Griffen, 2020) and the Hungarian government actively compromises NGOs in their work (Vass, 2021). In 2017, the government even adopted legislation that laid down stricter rules on registering NGO funding from abroad. It also required NGOs to state on their website and in reports that they are an organization funded by foreign money if they receive more than 19.900 euros in foreign donations a year (Vass, 2021). After a CJEU ruling and an infringement procedure by the Commission, the law was eventually revoked (Vass, 2021). Beyond this legislation, the government still actively engages in stigmatizing NGOs (Bárd, 2020; Vass, 2021). At the same time, the government tries to limit press freedom more and more (Griffen, 2020). The stigmatization of NGOs and the limitation of press freedom could be a reason for NGOs to produce fewer and shorter documents in Hungary.

#### **6.4 Greek government: constantly denying**

In this section, some of the findings of the case of Greece will be elaborated upon. In the government statements analyzed, only 12 codes have been found in the 6 documents analyzed. The Greek government constantly denies pushbacks taking place. The denial does not support a specific discourse. Instead of acknowledging flaws in its practices, the PM argues that Greece protects those “in need” (Daily Sabah, 2020). This seems to be part of the victimization discourse but since these people are not victims of pushbacks, according to the Greek PM, this has not been included in the coding.

Although the PM does not specifically frame refugees and other migrants as victims of pushbacks, he acknowledges the responsibility of the Greek government to adhere to international law. The Greek government has an obligation to provide shelter (because pushbacks are prohibited) so it does provide shelter to these people. In an interview with CNN, the PM argued that “Greece is a country that respects the rule of law, we've granted asylum to tens of thousands of people” (Daily Sabah, 2020). This is an example of a frame used in the human rights discourse. However, it is not a human rights discourse as expected to be in place by this thesis. This thesis expects the human rights discourse to

focus on acknowledging pushbacks as a form of a human rights violation, degrading treatment, and arbitrary practice. According to the Greek government, there are simply no occasions of degrading treatment and pushbacks, therefore, only a small part of the human rights discourse was found.

Furthermore, the media touches upon various discourses (see figure 2). This way the international media gives a voice to different types of actors. NGO representatives are often asked for their opinion in newspapers, while the perspective of the Greek government is also paid attention to. By highlighting the opinion of different actors, newspapers try to present a neutral picture of the interests involved. However, looking at the data, we can see that newspapers highlight the human rights (35 codes identified) and victimization discourse (11) more than the security threat discourse (7). Therefore, newspaper articles are far from neutral in the discourse produced. They repeat the discourse produced by NGOs and spread this to a wider public.

### **6.5 Reflection on framing of time periods**

Propositions C4.1 (populists frame a period as a crisis) and C5.1 (NGOs frame a period as a wealthy one) were developed to gather deeper insights into the frames used by populists and NGOs. Both propositions were not supported in both cases. However, reflecting on the propositions, it could have been expected that they would not be supported. If times would be turbulent and unprecedented numbers of migrants arrive, populists could use this to their advantage and frame this as a crisis. At the same time, NGOs could emphasize that vulnerable people need protection since the conditions are appalling, and Europe has the resources to help them. In 2015, the migration situation was framed as a crisis in the public sphere (Hangartner, Dinas, Marbach, Matakos & Xefteris, 2018). However, currently, the number of arrivals is low compared to 2015 (EC, n.d.). Therefore, it seems logical that populists and NGOs would not use the current situation as a reason to either engage in pushbacks or advocate against them.

## 7. Conclusion

In this final chapter, the research question will be answered. The limitations of this study will be discussed as well as recommendations for future research. Lastly, the practical implications of this thesis will be elaborated upon.

### 7.1 Answering the research question

This thesis applied congruence analysis to the discourse around pushbacks in Greece and Hungary. The research question this thesis has been trying to answer is: *Is realism or constructivism better to explain the discourse around pushbacks at the European border from 2019 until 2022?* Three main discourses were derived from the literature: economic, securitization, and humanitarian discourse. These discourses again have sub-types. Six discourses were identified namely the negative economic discourse, positive economic discourse, security threat discourse, national identity discourse, victimization discourse, and human rights discourse. Since IR and migration are closely related to each other (Weiner, 1985), the choice was made to include realism and constructivism as the theoretical approaches. In the discussion around pushbacks, economic considerations are less important, therefore, liberalism (including the positive and negative economic discourse) has not been used in this thesis. The security threat discourse falls under realism, and the national identity, victimization, and human rights discourse under constructivism.

The analysis has shown that constructivism can best explain the discourse around pushbacks at the European border from 2019 until 2022. The human rights and victimization discourses have been identified as the dominant discourses in both cases. Both these discourses fall under constructivism. Since NGOs produce most of the human rights and victimization discourse, NGOs have been identified as the leading actor in the discourse around pushbacks. However, the other discourses were also identified, as the discourse produced by governments and populist parties (and sometimes media) presented the security threat and national identity discourse. Frames used under the security threat and national identity discourse were part of the overall discourse produced. Although constructivism is better to explain the discourse, realism can explain parts of the discourse as well. Therefore, it can be concluded that realist theory complements constructivism in explaining the discourse around pushbacks. Realist theory expects the government to play a leading role in the discourse produced. Since NGOs are the dominant actor in both cases, this assumption of realism was not found in practice. Under constructivism, two propositions were developed about what type of discourses NGOs and populists would use. It was expected that NGOs would use the humanitarian discourse, and populist parties would use the national identity discourse. Support was found for these propositions, meaning that constructivism provides us with insights into the types of discourses produced by both NGOs and populists. In other words, the assumption of constructivism that non-governing actors influence the discourse around pushbacks was found which gives constructivism even more explanatory power.

However, no propositions were developed on which actor would be most dominant, since constructivist theory does not discuss actors in such depth. Furthermore, the discussion shows that this thesis contributes to the literature on pushbacks as well as to populist literature.

## **7.2 Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, due to a language barrier, only international media newspaper articles were used to present the perspective of the media. As discussed, most of the Hungarian national media will be pro-government and reinforce the rhetoric used by the government (Griffen, 2020), meaning that national news coverage on pushbacks will be pro-pushbacks. In Greece, the national media is not controlled by the government and there is free press, but this does not mean that national media will present the same perspective as international media. The discourse produced by national media has an impact on the overall discourse produced. Therefore, not including national media as an actor is a limitation. However, excluding national media could also be seen as a strength. National media can be biased towards a certain type of discourse, whereas international media are known for being more impartial. Particularly, Politico, EUobserver, and EurActiv are well-known reliable sources. It is also easier to compare both cases if newspaper articles from the same newspapers have been used. Hence, the choice to exclude national media should not solely be seen as a limitation.

Realism and constructivism have been used. The choice was made to include the overarching theories (and not the sub-branches) because these theories have never been applied to discourses around pushbacks before. This thesis aimed to develop an understanding of the application of these theories on discourses. However, because these overarching theories have been used, the propositions were broader and less specific towards a specific branch of realism or constructivism. This could have led to broad results that do not fully cover the subtleties of these theories.

The coding scheme has been developed based on the literature. The discourses have often been implicitly referred to in existing literature and have never been applied to the discourse around pushbacks before. The coding scheme is an application of these discourses to the case of pushbacks. Since these discourses are broad and many terms and codes could fall under these discourses, the operationalization of the propositions should be interpreted with caution. Another researcher might have used a slightly adapted coding scheme that could have led to different results.

Given that only the author has looked for documentation, important documents could have been missed. If important statements have not been included, this can have a large impact on the number of codes identified per discourse. Moreover, only 3 documents have been analyzed for Greek populist parties, and the statements were limited to the ones of the party Greek Solution. If other documents would have been found, other results could have been produced. Therefore, it is important to stay critical of the findings, and if future researchers would like to engage with the results, they should be aware of this limitation.

### **7.3 Recommendations for future research**

This thesis makes several recommendations for future research. This thesis would suggest including national media in future research to analyze the discourse produced by national news outlets, meaning that researchers that understand Greek and Hungarian or translators should be part of the research. Moreover, this thesis suggests that future research could include other types of international newspaper outlets. Besides Politico, EUobserver, and EurActiv, other newspaper articles published in English could be used. Future research could also analyze the impact of the discourse. This thesis only addressed the frequency of codes found. The impact of the discourse on the population has not been analyzed. This could be done by conducting surveys about public perception of pushbacks to analyze which discourse has been taken over by the public. Besides Hungary and Greece, other cases could be analyzed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the different voices in Europe. Lastly, this thesis applied two overarching IR theories. Future research could apply the sub-branches of these theories to dive deeper into the theoretical approaches. For example, neorealism and neoclassical realism could be applied for realism.

### **7.4 Practical implications**

The results carry practical implications that will be considered. Practitioners could use this thesis in their daily work. More specifically, NGO representatives could use the findings for their advocacy work. The findings show that NGOs produce the most discourse. Although NGOs have not been able to stop pushbacks from taking place yet, this observation could provide NGOs with insights into how they can improve their advocacy strategy. They already produce a lot of discourse, so they do not have to produce more reports and statements. However, since they have not been able to stop pushbacks from taking place, they could think about different ways to ensure that their message reaches media and governments. Governmental actors could also use the findings to critically reflect on their own responses. The results show that governmental actors produce relatively little discourse. In case this is not a deliberate choice of governmental actors, they could decide to engage more in discussions around pushbacks to convince others of their position. Besides government officials in Greece and Hungary, other governments could also use these results to analyze what response they deem adequate. Lastly, citizens could use the results of this thesis to hold their government to account. The results provide citizens with insights into the dynamics behind the discourse around pushbacks which could help them to make a deliberate decision about whether they support such practices.



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## Appendix I: Documents analyzed - Greece

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## Appendix II: Documents analyzed - Hungary

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## Appendix III: Overview codes per actor - Greece

Table 6: Codes identified for Greek government

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<p><b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b>  [refugees and migrants as a] threat  illegally [entering the country]  [promoting] tough [border policies]  terrorist attacks  wall</p> <p><b>control borders</b>  protect border (1)/defend border  [preserve] security</p>	<p>1 1 2   <b>1</b> 1</p>
C1: Victimization discourse	<p><b>victims [of pushbacks]</b>  vulnerable/vulnerability  cruel/hostile  in need/in need for protection [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks]  [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress  human dignity</p> <p><b>[physical] violence</b>  assaulted/abused/attacked/beatings/injuries/shootings</p> <p><b>stripped down of belongings</b></p>	
C2: Human rights discourse	<p><b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b>  [pushbacks are] unlawful  [pushbacks are] illegal</p> <p><b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/ international law</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b>  regular/organized/normal</p> <p><b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b>  arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure</p> <p><b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b>  ill-treatment/torture/inadequate conditions</p>	<p><b>3</b>  1  <b>1</b>   <b>1</b></p>

C3: National identity discourse	<p><b>[national] identity</b> tradition</p> <p><b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b> clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity] Christian identity</p>	
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Note: Coded by the author

Table 7: Codes identified for Greek populist parties

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<p><b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b> [refugees and migrants as a] threat illegally [entering the country] [promoting] tough [border policies] terrorist attacks wall</p> <p><b>control borders</b> protect border (1)/defend border (1) [preserve] security</p>	<p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p>
C1: Victimization discourse	<p><b>victims [of pushbacks]</b> vulnerable/vulnerability cruel/hostile in need/in need for protection [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks] [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress human dignity</p> <p><b>[physical] violence</b> assaulted/abused/attacked/beatings/injuries/shootings</p> <p><b>stripped down of belongings</b></p>	
C2: Human rights discourse	<p><b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b> [pushbacks are] unlawful [pushbacks are] illegal</p> <p><b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/ international law</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b> regular/organized/normal</p>	

	<b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b>  <b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b> arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure  <b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b> ill-treatment/torture/inadequate conditions	
C3: National identity discourse	<b>[national] identity</b> tradition  <b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b> clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity] Christian identity	   1 1

Note: Coded by the author

Table 8: Codes identified for NGOs (Greece)

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b> [refugees and migrants as a] threat illegally [entering the country] [promoting] tough [border policies] terrorist attacks wall  <b>control borders</b> protect border/defend border [preserve] security	
C1: Victimization discourse	<b>victims [of pushbacks]</b> vulnerable (4)/vulnerability (1) cruel/hostile in need (2)/in need for protection (15) [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks] [pushbacks put their lives] in danger (1)/in distress human dignity  <b>[physical] violence</b> assaulted (5)/abused (19)/attacked (7)/beatings (55)/injuries (17)/shootings (6)  <b>stripped down of belongings</b>	   27 5 17 1 2  49 109  38
C2: Human rights discourse	<b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b> [pushbacks are] unlawful	47 16

	[pushbacks are] illegal	9
	<b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/ international law</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b> regular (2)/organized (1)/normal	<b>9</b> 3
	<b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b> arbitrary arrest (4)/arbitrary detention (27)/arbitrary procedure (1)	<b>1</b> 32
	<b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b> ill-treatment (9)/torture (11)/inadequate conditions (15)	<b>9</b> 35
C3: National identity discourse	<b>[national] identity</b> tradition  <b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b> clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity] Christian identity	

Note: Coded by the author

Table 9: Codes identified for international media (Greece)

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b> [refugees and migrants as a] threat illegally [entering the country] [promoting] tough [border policies] terrorist attacks wall  <b>control borders</b> protect border (4)/defend border [preserve] security	3       4
C1: Victimization discourse	<b>victims [of pushbacks]</b> vulnerable/vulnerability cruel/hostile in need (1)/in need for protection [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks] [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress	1

	<p>human dignity</p> <p><b>[physical] violence</b>  assaulted/abused (1)/attacked/beatings (2)/injuries/  shootings</p> <p><b>stripped down of belongings</b></p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p>3</p> <p><b>2</b></p>
C2: Human rights discourse	<p><b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b>  [pushbacks are] unlawful  [pushbacks are] illegal</p> <p><b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/  international law</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b>  regular (2)/organized/normal (2)</p> <p><b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b>  arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure</p> <p><b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b>  ill-treatment (2)/torture/inadequate conditions</p>	<p><b>13</b></p> <p>1</p> <p>9</p> <p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>1</b></p> <p>4</p> <p><b>2</b></p>
C3: National identity discourse	<p><b>[national] identity</b>  tradition</p> <p><b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b>  clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity]  Christian identity</p>	

Note: Coded by the author

## Appendix IV: Overview codes per actor - Hungary

Table 10: Codes identified for Hungarian government

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<p><b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b>  [refugees and migrants as a] threat  illegally [entering the country]  [promoting] tough [border policies]  terrorist attacks  wall</p> <p><b>control borders</b>  protect border (2)/defend border (2)  [preserve] security</p>	<p>2</p> <p><b>1</b></p> <p>4</p> <p>2</p>
C1: Victimization discourse	<p><b>victims [of pushbacks]</b>  vulnerable/vulnerability  cruel/hostile  in need/in need for protection [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks]  [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress  human dignity</p> <p><b>[physical] violence</b>  assaulted/abused/attacked/beatings/injuries/shootings</p> <p><b>stripped down of belongings</b></p>	
C2: Human rights discourse	<p><b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b>  [pushbacks are] unlawful  [pushbacks are] illegal</p> <p><b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/  international law</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b>  regular/organized/normal</p> <p><b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b>  arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure</p> <p><b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b>  ill-treatment/torture/inadequate conditions</p>	

C3: National identity discourse	<b>[national] identity</b> tradition	2
	<b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b> clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity]	6
	Christian identity	9

Note: Coded by the author

Table 11: Codes identified for NGOs (Hungary)

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b> [refugees and migrants as a] threat illegally [entering the country] [promoting] tough [border policies] terrorist attacks wall  <b>control borders</b> protect border/defend border [preserve] security	
C1: Victimization discourse	<b>victims [of pushbacks]</b> vulnerable/vulnerability	7
	cruel (1)/hostile (1)	2
	in need/in need for protection (7) [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks] [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress human dignity	7
C1: Victimization discourse	<b>[physical] violence</b> assaulted (1)/abused (4)/attacked/beatings (6)/injuries (2)/shootings	10 13
	<b>stripped down of belongings</b>	1
	C2: Human rights discourse	<b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b> [pushbacks are] unlawful [pushbacks are] illegal
	<b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/ international law</b>	9



	<p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b> regular/organized/normal</p> <p><b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b> arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure</p> <p><b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b> ill-treatment (4)/torture/inadequate conditions</p>	<p>3</p> <p>4</p>
C3: National identity discourse	<p><b>[national] identity</b> tradition</p> <p><b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b> clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity] Christian identity</p>	

*Note:* Coded by the author

Table 12: Codes identified for international media (Hungary)

Propositions	Codes	Number
R1: Security threat discourse	<p><b>[migrants and refugees] are intruders/invaders</b> [refugees and migrants as a] threat illegally [entering the country] [promoting] tough [border policies] terrorist attacks wall</p> <p><b>control borders</b> protect border (3)/defend border [preserve] security</p>	<p>8</p> <p>3</p>
C1: Victimization discourse	<p><b>victims [of pushbacks]</b> vulnerable/vulnerability cruel/hostile in need/in need for protection (1) [and they do not receive protection because of pushbacks] [pushbacks put their lives] in danger/in distress human dignity</p> <p><b>[physical] violence</b> assaulted/abused (1)/attacked/beatings/injuries/ shootings</p> <p><b>stripped down of belongings</b></p>	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>

C2: Human rights discourse	<p><b>[pushbacks are] human rights [violations/abuses]</b>  [pushbacks are] unlawful  [pushbacks are] illegal</p> <p><b>[pushbacks are prohibited under] EU law/  international law</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks as] systematic</b>  regular (1)/organized/normal</p> <p><b>responsibility of governments [to prevent pushbacks]</b></p> <p><b>[pushbacks are] arbitrary practices</b>  arbitrary arrest/arbitrary detention/arbitrary procedure</p> <p><b>degrading [or inhuman] treatment</b>  ill-treatment/torture/inadequate conditions</p>	<p>7</p> <p>4</p> <p>8</p> <p>1</p>
C3: National identity discourse	<p><b>[national] identity</b>  tradition</p> <p><b>[pushbacks to] defend national culture</b>  clash of religions [between Islam and Christianity]  Christian identity</p>	

*Note:* Coded by the author