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FROM SOCIAL SECURITY TO GEOSTRATEGIC POWER: ANALYSING THE STRATEGIC NEXUS BETWEEN SOCIAL SECURITY SUSTAINABILITY, STATE CAPACITY, DOMESTIC STABILITY AND FOREIGN POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the financial sustainability of social security systems not merely as a problem of social policy or public finance but as a multidimensional issue bearing on the long-term strategic capacity of states. Its principal aim is to analyse, within a holistic framework, the relationship between social security sustainability and state capacity, domestic stability, foreign policy effectiveness and geostrategic power. The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that brings together public finance, labour economics, political science, public administration, demography, health economics, international relations and strategic studies. Methodologically, it employs a theory-building, explanatory qualitative design in which official statistics, actuarial indicators and international indices are analysed as supporting numerical evidence through document analysis. The experience of the Social Security Institution in Türkiye is selected as the principal field of analysis. The study develops a Geostrategic Social Security Theory, which proposes a causal chain linking social security to geostrategic power through economic security, human security, societal resilience, institutional trust, state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness. The findings indicate that financially strong social security systems nourish social trust, institutional legitimacy and economic resilience, and that this accumulated strength widens the scope for domestic stability and foreign policy manoeuvre. The study further opens to discussion a Strategic Active Ageing Model, resting on the principle of voluntariness and differentiated according to the nature of working life, together with a welfare-oriented pension approach. The results reveal that social security institutions should be regarded as essential components not only of the welfare state but also of strategic state-building.

KEYWORDS: social security sustainability; state capacity; domestic stability; foreign policy effectiveness; geostrategic power; active ageing

1. INTRODUCTION

Social security systems rank among the most fundamental institutional structures through which modern states provide their citizens with income security, health coverage and social protection. These systems are not merely financial mechanisms that ensure the payment of retirement pensions; they also perform vital functions in sustaining social solidarity, preventing excessive distortions in income

distribution and managing social risks. The welfare state paradigm that rose in the aftermath of the Second World War turned social security into one of the state's core areas of responsibility (Barr, 2020; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Today, social security has moved beyond the boundaries of social policy debates and has become a shared field of inquiry for public finance, labour economics, political science, public administration and international relations. The principal reason for this shift is that the financial problems experienced in the field of social security now directly affect not only retirees or workers but also states' budgetary balances, economic resilience and social stability. Indeed, in many countries social security expenditure constitutes one of the largest items in public budgets, while ageing populations, declining fertility, lengthening life expectancy and rising health expenditure intensify the pressure on these systems with each passing year (Lee & Mason, 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). Reports issued by international organisations likewise draw attention to this transformation, emphasising that fragilities in social protection may leave lasting marks on public finances and economic growth (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). For this reason, the financial sustainability of social security systems deserves to be treated not merely as a technical matter of public finance but as a strategic issue bearing on the long-term viability of states. Every financial fragility that emerges in the field of social security generates fresh pressure on public finances; over time, such pressure affects economic growth, investment capacity and the quality of public services. The future of social security systems has therefore become an issue too important to be considered independently of the future of states themselves.

A substantial share of the problems confronting social security systems worldwide is associated with demographic transformation. United Nations projections show that the world's population is ageing steadily and that the share of older age groups in the total population is rising without interruption (United Nations, 2022). Across OECD countries, the ratio of the working population to the retired population has been declining for a long time (OECD, 2023). This development places direct strain on contribution-based financing structures, because in many countries the pension system rests on the principle that the contributions paid by workers cover retirees' pensions. As the number of workers falls and the number of retirees rises, increasing life expectancy also extends the length of time spent in retirement (Harper, 2014). Factors such as informal employment, youth unemployment, low productivity, low wage levels and short-term political interventions further aggravate this picture (Alper, 2021; Holzmann & Hinz, 2005). Türkiye is no exception to these developments. Official statistics reveal that Türkiye is moving rapidly towards the group of ageing countries (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2024). The changing balance over time between the number of active contributors and the number of pension recipients further intensifies debates about the system's future. As is evident, the problem is multidimensional and exceeds the explanatory power of any single discipline. The sustainability of social security systems concerns the welfare not only of the present but also of future generations. It is therefore necessary to address the effects of social security on the economy, society and the state together, and to evaluate causes and consequences within a holistic framework. This article is the product of precisely such a holistic outlook.

The bulk of scholarship on social security concentrates on issues such as financing deficits, pension reforms, actuarial balances and demographic transformation, and mostly seeks to answer the question of how systems can be made more sustainable (Barr & Diamond, 2008; Whitehouse, 2007). Yet the effects of the financial performance of social security systems on state capacity have been examined comparatively little. State capacity, however, denotes a state's ability to raise resources, deliver public services, maintain social order and achieve its long-term strategic objectives (Besley & Persson, 2011; Fukuyama, 2004). A financially fragile social security system can exert continuous pressure on the public budget; that pressure can constrain the resources available for education, health, defence, technology and infrastructure investment, and can weaken the state's capacity for long-term planning. Similarly, a system unable to provide citizens with adequate protection can feed social discontent, and discontent can erode social cohesion and institutional trust (Putnam, 2000; Rothstein, 2011). Since the weakening of institutional trust can adversely affect state-society relations, new pressures on domestic stability may also arise. Although various facets of this relationship have been addressed separately in the existing literature, a holistic causal chain running from social security to state capacity, and from there to domestic stability and foreign policy, has rarely been established. This article offers an interdisciplinary perspective designed to remedy that deficiency. The study's point of departure is that social security systems generate not only social but also strategic consequences; its central thesis is that social security sustainability exerts decisive effects on state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness.

The relationship between state capacity and domestic stability has long been debated in the political science and public administration literatures. Countries endowed with strong state capacity are widely acknowledged to be more resilient in the face of economic crises, social tensions and external pressures (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Evans, 1995). One of the principal reasons is that robust institutional structures can manage societal expectations more effectively. Social security systems are among the important components of these institutional structures. Citizens' possession of income security in retirement, their access to health services and their protection against social risks reinforce the sense of social trust. In societies with strong social security, social exclusion, extreme poverty and income insecurity remain at lower levels, which in turn nourishes social cohesion and solidarity (Buğra, 2019; Korpi & Palme, 1998). Stronger social cohesion, in its turn, helps preserve domestic stability. Domestic stability is not a concept confined to its security dimension; it is also closely bound up with economic predictability, political legitimacy and institutional trust. There is a long-standing debate suggesting that persistent weaknesses in social protection mechanisms and deficits of legitimacy may, over the long run, feed social unrest (Habermas, 1975; Stiglitz, 2012). Conversely, sustainable and trust-inspiring systems appear to enhance societal resilience. This article aims to render more visible these indirect yet powerful linkages running from social security to domestic stability.

The relationship between domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness, for its part, is addressed in the international relations literature chiefly within debates on state capacity and national power. An effective foreign policy does not rest solely on military capability or economic size; it also draws on

elements such as domestic political stability, institutional resilience and social integration (Nye, 2011; Zakaria, 1998). States heavily preoccupied with internal problems find it harder to develop long-term and coherent strategies in foreign policy, whereas countries that are economically and socially stable can assume more effective roles in the international arena. The neoclassical realist approach likewise stresses that foreign policy behaviour is not determined by the international system alone, and that domestic factors and a state's ability to mobilise its resources play significant roles (Rose, 1998; Taliaferro et al., 2009). At this juncture, the indirect effects of social security systems can extend into the realm of foreign policy. A financially sustainable system can ease the pressure on the public budget, thereby allowing greater resources to be allocated to defence, diplomacy, technology and strategic infrastructure investment. Rising social welfare can strengthen the state's legitimacy and institutional credibility, and a strengthened institutional apparatus can enhance the capacity to implement foreign policy decisions. Studies examining the direct relationship between social security and foreign policy effectiveness remain quite scarce in the literature; nevertheless, the state capacity and national power literatures supply theoretical tools well suited to establishing this connection (Taliaferro, 2006; Tellis et al., 2000). This article, accordingly, brings together the linkages among social security, domestic stability and foreign policy within a single analytical framework.

The principal aim of this research is to explain the strategic relationship between the financial sustainability of social security systems and state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness. The study argues that viewing social security systems merely as social assistance or pension mechanisms falls short, because these systems are structures that directly affect states' economic resilience, social cohesion and institutional legitimacy. The economic crises, the pandemic, energy bottlenecks and regional conflicts of recent years have rendered the strategic importance of social protection mechanisms more visible, demonstrating that these mechanisms are institutional structures that protect not only individuals but states as well (ILO, 2021; United Nations, 2023). The scope of the research encompasses a multilayered web of relationships extending from the financing problems of social security systems to state capacity, social welfare, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness. The study therefore does not remain within the confines of a single discipline; it draws jointly on the literatures of public finance, social policy, labour economics, political science, public administration, demography and international relations. Moreover, reform debates in the field of social security are evaluated not only in the context of fiscal balances but also in the context of states' strategic futures. In this respect, the article departs from the narrowly framed analyses prevalent in the existing literature.

The first core concept constituting the study's conceptual framework is financial sustainability. Financial sustainability denotes the capacity of social security systems to preserve their revenue-expenditure balances over the long term. For a system to be financially sustainable does not mean merely that it can meet its present obligations; it also entails the establishment of a financial architecture that will safeguard the rights of future generations (Barr, 2020; Holzmann, 2013). The concept embraces numerous variables, including actuarial balance, fund management, contribution

revenues, pension liabilities and health expenditure. The performance of a social security system therefore cannot be assessed solely by the magnitude of budget transfers; the system's ability to adapt to demographic transformation, economic fluctuations and changes in the labour market is equally decisive. The literature identifies ageing populations, low fertility, informal employment and low labour productivity as the principal obstacles to sustainability (Disney, 2007; OECD, 2023). Similar problems are becoming increasingly visible in Türkiye as well: the changing ratio of active contributors to pension recipients, rising health expenditure and lengthening average life expectancy are intensifying the pressure on the system. This picture demonstrates that financial sustainability is not merely a technical field of calculation but a strategic variable that produces social and political consequences. The study accordingly treats the concept within this broader social and political context. The second core concept is state capacity. State capacity is generally defined as the state's ability to formulate policy, raise resources, deliver public services and maintain social order (Fukuyama, 2004; Mann, 1984). The ability to use public resources effectively, to sustain public services without interruption and to respond to societal demands also falls within the concept (Eryılmaz, 2023; Fukuyama, 2014). Recent work devoted to measuring state capacity shows that the concept comprises mutually reinforcing dimensions such as extractive capacity, administrative effectiveness and coercive capacity (Hanson & Sigman, 2021). That countries with strong state capacity fare better in processes of economic development has long been known, and robust relationships also exist between the effectiveness of public institutions and social trust (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Rothstein, 2011). Social security systems are among the most visible domains of state capacity, because retirement pensions, health services and social protection programmes stand at the forefront of the services through which citizens interact most intensively with the state. When these services are delivered effectively, citizens' trust in the state can rise; when service quality declines owing to financial problems, institutional trust can be damaged. The relationship, moreover, is bidirectional: strong state capacity facilitates the establishment of sustainable social security systems, while strong social security systems can in turn nourish state capacity. The study examines this mechanism of mutual interaction in detail.

The third core concept is domestic stability. Domestic stability does not mean merely the preservation of public order; it also encompasses the maintenance of social cohesion, the continuity of institutional trust, the preservation of economic predictability and the endurance of political legitimacy (Rosanvallon, 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Social security systems are known to play significant roles in these processes. Excessive growth in income inequality, the spread of poverty and the weakening of social protection mechanisms can heighten social tensions. Strong social security systems, by contrast, contribute to social integration by reducing social risks. Arrangements such as pension and health guarantees diminish citizens' uncertainties about the future; reduced uncertainty supports social peace, and social peace in turn supports the stable conduct of economic activity. This effect can be felt across a broad field stretching from the investment climate to public administration. The relationships among social capital, social trust and institutional trust have been examined in detail in the literature (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000); the strategic role that social security systems play

in these processes, however, has been addressed to a more limited extent. This article aims to fill that gap by setting out systematically the linkages between social security and domestic stability.

The fourth concept, constituting the international relations dimension of the research, is foreign policy effectiveness, and the fifth is geostrategic power. Foreign policy effectiveness may be defined as a state's capacity to achieve its international objectives and to produce effective outcomes in its external environment (Nye, 2004; Walt, 2018). This capacity derives not only from military strength or economic size but also from domestic political order, economic resilience, social cohesion and institutional capacity (Ripsman et al., 2016; Rose, 1998). Geostrategic power, in turn, is treated in this study as a state's capacity to convert its economic, political and institutional resources into foreign policy objectives. That the distribution of power in the international system and great-power relations are affected by shifts in states' domestic resource bases has long been emphasised in the literature (Gilpin, 1981; Waltz, 1979). Within this framework, the article's core approach holds that social security systems are not merely fiscal institutions; they are strategic institutions that generate societal resilience and state capacity. This approach contends that social security sustainability can produce geostrategic consequences through state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness, and thereby seeks to build a new bridge between the social security literature and the international relations literature.

In explaining the relationship between social security and state capacity, the study also draws on the human security approach. The human security approach does not regard security merely as protection from military threats; it counts elements such as economic security, health security, food security and social security among the fundamental components of security (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). This approach demonstrates that social security systems produce not only welfare but security as well. In societies with strong social protection mechanisms, individuals experience less anxiety about the future, which reinforces social trust and institutional attachment. Strengthened social trust, in turn, contributes to placing the relationship between state and citizen on firmer foundations. The human security literature shows that economic insecurities can, over time, evolve into social and political instabilities (Newman, 2010; Paris, 2001). The functionality of social security systems therefore matters not only for individual welfare but also for societal security. Mechanisms that provide protection against income losses, in particular, can enhance societal resilience in times of crisis. By evaluating this relationship together with the concepts of state capacity and domestic stability, the study renders visible the effects of social security that extend into the realm of national security.

The theoretical approach employed in the research aims to render visible a field of relationships that has been treated only to a limited extent in the literature. To this end, the study draws on a conceptual framework designated the Geostrategic Social Security Theory. The theory's fundamental assumption is that social security systems are not merely mechanisms of fiscal transfer; they are also structures that generate social trust, institutional legitimacy, human security and state capacity. Each of these

elements affects a different dimension of national power production (Fukuyama, 2004; Nye, 2011). According to the theory, the chain operates as follows: social security sustainability supports economic security; economic security strengthens human security; strengthened human security enhances societal resilience; societal resilience nourishes institutional trust; institutional trust contributes to the development of state capacity; growth in state capacity supports domestic stability, and domestic stability supports foreign policy effectiveness; at the final stage, foreign policy effectiveness contributes to the state's capacity to generate geostrategic power. This model constitutes the core analytical framework guiding all sections of the study and enables a new connection to be established between the social security literature and the international relations literature.

Proceeding from this intellectual background, the research's central question is formulated as follows: How does the financial sustainability of social security systems affect a state's capacity to generate geostrategic power through state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness? This question brings together, on a common plane of analysis, fields that the literature has mostly treated in isolation. Research on social security financing generally concentrates on budget deficits, pension systems and actuarial balances (Barr & Diamond, 2009; Holzmann, 2013); the state capacity literature dwells chiefly on the effectiveness of institutional structures and the performance of public administration (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Fukuyama, 2014); and the international relations literature examines the relationship between domestic capacity and foreign policy within diverse theoretical approaches (Ripsman et al., 2016; Zakaria, 1998). Studies addressing the connections among these fields in a holistic manner remain very few, and how deteriorations in the financial structure of social security systems affect the other domains of the state has not been adequately explained. The research's central question targets precisely this gap and constitutes the main axis securing the article's theoretical coherence. The findings presented in the subsequent sections of the study are structured so as to answer this question.

Six auxiliary research questions have also been developed in support of the central question. The first auxiliary question concerns the principal structural factors that determine the financial sustainability of social security systems; within this scope, variables such as ageing populations, low fertility, informal employment, high health expenditure, low labour productivity and actuarial imbalances are examined (Lee & Mason, 2011; OECD, 2023). The second auxiliary question is directed at explaining through which mechanisms the effects of the financial performance of social security systems on state capacity come about. The third auxiliary question aims to understand how the relationship between state capacity and domestic stability takes shape in the context of social security. The fourth auxiliary question concerns the extent to which domestic stability affects foreign policy effectiveness. The fifth auxiliary question investigates whether financially sustainable social security systems widen states' room for strategic manoeuvre. The sixth auxiliary question focuses on whether social security reforms produce only fiscal consequences or also generate social and geostrategic consequences. Each of these questions represents a different dimension of the central thesis; taken together, they make it possible to examine in detail both the causal claim of the research problem and the mechanisms through which

that claim operates. These questions also delimit the boundaries of the theoretical model to be developed in the subsequent sections of the study.

The research's central hypothesis has been constructed so as to answer the central question, as follows: the financial sustainability of social security systems strengthens state capacity; growth in state capacity supports domestic stability; and domestic stability, by enhancing foreign policy effectiveness, contributes to the generation of geostrategic power. The hypothesis proceeds from the idea that financially sound social security systems can reduce the pressures on public finances. An easing of pressure on public finances can enable states to use their resources more effectively (Besley & Persson, 2009; Dincecco & Katz, 2016). The resources available for fields such as education, health, technology, infrastructure and defence can thereby increase; expanding resource capacity can strengthen institutional effectiveness, institutional effectiveness can strengthen social trust and political legitimacy, and these in turn can strengthen domestic stability. Stronger domestic stability can, in its turn, raise the capacity to implement foreign policy decisions. As is evident, the effects of social security systems emerge not directly but through a multilayered causal chain, and the central hypothesis is directed at explaining precisely this multilayered structure. The subsequent sections of the study elaborate the theoretical foundations of the hypothesis in detail and construct the scientific groundwork for the relationship between social security and geostrategic power.

Alongside the central hypothesis, seven auxiliary hypotheses have been developed so as to answer the auxiliary questions. The first auxiliary hypothesis holds that as the financial sustainability of the social security system increases, state capacity will increase. The second auxiliary hypothesis asserts that growth in state capacity will raise levels of social welfare and institutional trust. The third auxiliary hypothesis rests on the assumption that rising levels of social welfare and institutional trust will strengthen domestic stability. The fourth auxiliary hypothesis maintains that as the level of domestic stability rises, foreign policy effectiveness will increase. The fifth auxiliary hypothesis holds that an improvement in the actuarial balance of social security systems will reduce the pressures on public finances. The sixth auxiliary hypothesis asserts that fiscal relief will create additional resources for defence, diplomacy, technology and strategic investment. The seventh auxiliary hypothesis, finally, contends that the relationship between social security sustainability and geostrategic power is not direct but is nonetheless a strong indirect one. Considered individually, these hypotheses remain incomplete; they acquire their full meaning when taken together, because the research seeks to explain a multi-stage chain of relationships running from social security to foreign policy, and the auxiliary hypotheses represent the different links of that chain. The study's analytical framework thereby attains a systematic and testable structure.

The method adopted in the research rests on a design grounded in conceptual and theoretical analysis. The study's purpose is not so much to measure a particular country's social security system empirically as to explain the theoretical relationship between social security sustainability and geostrategic power. An interdisciplinary approach has therefore been adopted, and a comprehensive conceptual framework

has been constructed by drawing on the literatures of social policy, public finance, labour economics, political science, public administration and international relations. Different theoretical approaches have been examined comparatively; concepts treated independently of one another in the literature have been reinterpreted within a common framework; and, by synthesising the findings of existing studies, an analytical model directed at explaining cause-and-effect relationships has been developed. In this way, it has been possible to assess not only the effects of social security systems in the field of social welfare but also their indirect effects on state capacity and foreign policy. In this respect, the research is explanatory and theory-building in character; it aims not merely to summarise existing knowledge but also to contribute to the emergence of new fields of inquiry and to provide a conceptual foundation for the empirical research to be conducted in the future.

In delimiting the scope, certain limitations have also been set out explicitly. First, the study is not an empirical analysis conducted on the case of a particular country; it aims to develop a general model on the basis of the theoretical and conceptual accumulation in the international literature. Direct statistical tests or econometric analyses are therefore not employed; the framework developed can, however, be tested with empirical methods in later periods. Second, the research does not aim to examine all dimensions of social security systems in detail; pension systems, health insurance, social assistance and unemployment insurance are addressed only insofar as they relate to the core purpose. Third, geostrategic power is not evaluated solely through military capability; broader variables such as economic resilience, institutional capacity, social stability and foreign policy effectiveness are taken into account. Fourth, although the conceptual model is built on an assumption of linear relationships, it is acknowledged that real-world processes are far more complex; the conclusions reached should therefore be read not as absolute cause-and-effect relationships but as strong theoretical tendencies. Stating these limitations openly preserves academic transparency and points to new fields of inquiry for future studies. Far from diminishing the study's scientific value, this strengthens its credibility.

One of the notable features of the research is that social security reforms are not evaluated solely through the objective of cost reduction. The study argues that policy options capable of preserving the welfare of workers and retirees while securing sustainability must also be examined. Active ageing policies, flexible working models, gradual retirement schemes and experience-oriented labour market policies gain importance within this scope (Foster & Walker, 2015; World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). In recent years, the view that the older population constitutes an important resource in terms of knowledge, experience and institutional memory has been gaining ground in many countries, and approaches that treat the productivity of older age groups as entirely exhausted are being questioned ever more strongly (Börsch-Supan, 2013; Skirbekk, 2008). Accordingly, the study gives space to alternative scenarios that may be evaluated in the context of high life expectancy, improving health conditions and active ageing policies, as well as to options concerning differentiated retirement models for different occupational groups and the redesign of working life at advanced ages. These proposals, however, are treated not as absolute truths but as long-term policy scenarios that may be evaluated under specified assumptions. The aim is not to advocate any policy proposal in advance but

to examine objectively the possible effects of different options on social security sustainability and state capacity. This approach preserves academic objectivity while allowing alternative reform options to be discussed.

The study's originality derives in large measure from the theoretical bridge it builds across different disciplines. In the existing literature, social security systems are examined mostly through the lens of social policy or public finance, while in the international relations literature states' foreign policy performance is explained chiefly through military capability, economic power, diplomatic resources or the structural features of the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). A substantial share of state capacity scholarship likewise focuses on indicators such as tax-raising capacity, bureaucratic quality or institutional effectiveness, while the effects of social security systems on state capacity are addressed only to a limited extent (Besley & Persson, 2011; Hanson & Sigman, 2021). Similarly, while most international relations theories foreground the structural features of the system (Gilpin, 1981; Waltz, 1979), even the neoclassical realist approaches that emphasise domestic factors mostly leave the social security variable outside the analysis (Rose, 1998; Taliaferro et al., 2009). Yet social security systems are institutions that affect the lives of millions of people, absorb a substantial share of state budgets and exert direct effects on social legitimacy. It is precisely at this point that this article develops a new perspective: by treating social security sustainability, state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness within the same theoretical model, it brings together knowledge produced in different disciplines within a common explanatory framework. It thereby contributes to the social security literature, to state capacity scholarship and to the field of international relations alike, showing in particular that the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy may be more permeable than commonly supposed.

In conclusion, this research seeks to answer the following central question: How does the financial sustainability of social security systems affect states' capacity to generate geostrategic power through state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness? This central question is accompanied by six auxiliary questions addressing the structural factors that determine sustainability, the mechanisms through which the effect operates, the linkages among state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy, and the social and geostrategic consequences of reforms. The contributions expected from the article can be gathered under five headings. The first is the theoretical contribution: the study integrates the social security literature with the state capacity and international relations literatures and develops, under the name Geostrategic Social Security Theory, a new conceptual model that explains the connections between social security sustainability and national power production. By arguing that state capacity does not consist solely of economic and administrative dimensions and that social protection capacity is also an important part of this structure, the model opens a new field within state capacity debates and prepares the ground for rethinking the relationships between the welfare state and state power. The second is the interdisciplinary contribution: the relationship between domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness is reinterpreted from a social security perspective; a variable generally neglected in the international relations literature is rendered visible; and it is shown

that social security policies are not merely instruments of domestic politics. The third is the conceptual contribution: financial sustainability, state capacity, domestic stability, foreign policy effectiveness and geostrategic power are defined within the same causal chain, and the transitions among these concepts are explained systematically. The fourth is the policy contribution: in many countries today, reform debates are conducted largely through cost-reduction objectives alone; the study demonstrates, however, that decisions taken in the field of social security can affect state capacity, social stability and foreign policy performance over the long run. A holistic outlook is therefore proposed that goes beyond short-term fiscal indicators, balances financial sustainability with social welfare and takes account of states' long-term strategic planning; the research's findings are thereby intended to hold value beyond academic circles, for policymakers and practitioners as well. The fifth is the contribution to the research agenda: the model developed offers testable theoretical propositions for future empirical studies and prepares the ground for comparative research. In these respects, the article substantiates its core argument that sustainable social security systems are among the significant determinants not only of social welfare but also of states' long-term geostrategic power. The remainder of the article is organised as follows: the second section presents the literature review, the third the theoretical framework and the fourth the research method; the fifth section sets out the findings, the sixth discusses those findings, and the seventh is devoted to the conclusion and recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social security systems rank among the most deeply rooted institutional structures of the modern state. It has long been argued in the literature that these systems are not merely technical mechanisms for transferring income; they are structures that strengthen social solidarity, distribute economic risks across generations and social groups, and consolidate the bond between citizens and the state (Barr, 2020; Marshall, 1992). The concept of social citizenship developed by Marshall defined social rights as the natural continuation of civil and political rights; social security thereby became an inseparable component of citizenship status (Marshall, 1992). Studies examining the historical development of the welfare state have likewise shown that social insurance institutions in Europe and America evolved hand in hand with processes of state building, that they constituted an institutional response to the risks generated by industrialisation, and that they can be regarded as the product of cross-class solidarity coalitions (Baldwin, 1990; Briggs, 2000; Flora & Heidenheimer, 2009). The founding texts of the Turkish-language social policy literature likewise treated social security as an inseparable component of labour relations and social justice, systematising the conceptual framework of the field at an early stage (Talas, 1997; Koray, 2005; Koray, 2008). Comparative studies that track, through long-term panel data, the outcomes welfare regimes produce over individuals' life course further show that different regime types diverge markedly in terms of poverty and income security (Goodin et al., 1999). Esping-Andersen's classification of welfare regimes demonstrated that, although social security institutions take different forms from one country to another, they everywhere perform the function of protecting the individual against market risks (Esping-Andersen, 1990); the debate that developed over the scope and limits of this typology, in turn, transformed welfare regime research into one of the most productive fields of comparative social policy (Arts & Gelissen, 2002). One of the most striking

findings of this literature is the phenomenon that Korpi and Palme termed the "paradox of redistribution": universal systems covering the entire population reduce income inequality and poverty more powerfully than narrowly targeted systems focused solely on the poor (Korpi & Palme, 1998). The finding that social protection mechanisms reduce poverty and limit social exclusion is likewise confirmed in the comparative reports of international organisations (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2014). Moreover, the welfare state experience that developed in Europe after the Second World War demonstrated that social security does not conflict with economic development and that well-designed systems can support growth over the long run (Baldwin, 1990; Barr & Diamond, 2008). The reduction of individuals' uncertainty about the future also has favourable effects on saving and investment decisions (World Bank, 1994). As a result of this accumulated body of knowledge, social security has today become a shared field of inquiry not only for labour economics but also for political science, public administration, public finance, and development studies. While the share of studies that approach the subject through a purely cost-centred lens has been declining, the number of studies examining the effects of social security on societal resilience, institutional trust, and state capacity has been rising markedly (Fukuyama, 1995; Rothstein, 2011).

The predominant strand of the literature on the sustainability of social security systems concentrates on problems of fiscal balance. Within the public economics literature, the effects of social security on saving, labour supply, and retirement decisions have been examined in detail (Diamond, 2004; Feldstein & Liebman, 2002), and the magnitude and distribution of the gains expected from pension reform have also been discussed at the theoretical level (Lindbeck & Persson, 2003). The multi-pillar pension approach developed within the World Bank's orbit proposes that the burden which public pay-as-you-go systems cannot carry alone be shared among different financing tiers (Holzmann & Hinz, 2005; World Bank, 2005), while comparisons covering fifty-three countries reveal enormous diversity in the design of retirement-income systems (Whitehouse, 2007). Population ageing, declining fertility rates, and lengthening life expectancy are identified as the principal sources of pressure on these systems (Harper, 2014; Lee & Mason, 2011). The progressive deterioration of the worker-to-pensioner ratio in OECD countries is one of the common findings of comparative reports, and this deterioration enlarges financing deficits in pay-as-you-go systems in particular (OECD, 2023). Broad cross-country comparisons have established that arrangements encouraging early retirement weaken fiscal balance by accelerating early exits from the system (Gruber & Wise, 2007), and it has been shown that in economies where informal employment is widespread the contribution base contracts and revenues fail to cover expenditures (Alper, 2021; ILO, 2024). Recent econometric analyses of Central and Eastern European countries likewise confirm that the revenue-expenditure structure of social security funds is tightly bound to demographic change and to movements in the labour supply of older workers (Dumiter et al., 2024). Studies on Türkiye point to a similar picture: it has been shown that the deterioration of the actuarial balance affects not only the social security institutions themselves but the overall structure of public finances (Yaşarlar, 2016), and that covering the deficits through transfers from the central budget increases the budget deficit, the public sector borrowing requirement, and the debt stock (Cural, 2016; Erdem, 2022; Mıynat Taşdemir, 2025). Confronted with these pressures,

many countries have turned to reform instruments such as raising the retirement age, broadening the contribution base, and introducing flexible retirement arrangements; it has been argued that some of the widespread assumptions about ageing are empirically exaggerated and that balances can be preserved through properly designed and rational reforms (Börsch-Supan, 2007; Börsch-Supan, 2013). There are, however, strong objections in the literature to evaluating reforms solely through fiscal indicators. Barr and Diamond emphasise that reducing pension reform to mere budgetary targets leads to analytical errors and that systems must be assessed jointly in terms of their welfare, work-incentive, and risk-sharing dimensions (Barr, 2020; Barr & Diamond, 2009). The critical tradition that drew attention to the contradictions of the welfare state had, much earlier still, established that social security is interwoven with social peace, social justice, and state legitimacy, and that sustainability therefore cannot be defined through actuarial balance alone (Offe, 1984).

The relationship between demographic transformation and social security has been among the most intensively researched topics of the last two decades. United Nations projections show that the world's population is ageing rapidly and that the share of the population aged sixty-five and over will rise in almost every region in the coming decades (United Nations, 2022). Although the lengthening of life expectancy is an important achievement for humanity, the extension of the time spent in retirement enlarges social security expenditures and creates new pressures on economic growth (Bloom et al., 2010). When the decline in fertility rates is added to this, it becomes clear that the working-age population will contract in the future and that the financing base will weaken; nevertheless, studies that treat population projections jointly with their education and skills dimension indicate that improvements in human capital may partly offset the effect of the numerical contraction (Lutz et al., 2014). Two contributions from the demographic literature refine this debate considerably. The first is the concept of the demographic window of opportunity: in the initial phase of fertility decline, the share of the working-age population rises temporarily, creating a gain that can be converted into growth through the right policies (Bloom et al., 2003). The second is the objection concerning the measurement of old age: Sanderson and Scherbov show that ageing should be assessed not by a fixed chronological threshold but by prospective age measures based on remaining life expectancy, and that as life spans lengthen, the meaning carried by the age of sixty-five itself changes (Sanderson & Scherbov, 2010). Japan, Germany, and Italy are among the countries in which this dual demographic transformation is observed most distinctly, and they stand at the centre of reform debates (OECD, 2023). At the same time, a strong objection has developed in the literature to treating ageing solely in terms of its cost dimension; studies that discuss global ageing around the question of "peril or promise" emphasise that the outcome depends largely on policy choices (Beard et al., 2012). The active ageing framework put forward by the World Health Organization defines the participation of older age groups in economic, social, and cultural life as a component of health and well-being (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). According to Walker, the knowledge, experience, and institutional memory of older individuals constitute an important societal resource (Walker, 2002). Although early debates on the biological limits of the human lifespan drew attention to the possibility that the increase in average life expectancy might encounter certain physiological thresholds (Olshansky et al., 1993),

subsequent demographic data have shown that the improvement in life expectancy has continued. Research examining the relationship between productivity and chronological age likewise reveals that this relationship is not as linear as commonly assumed; performance does not inevitably decline with age but varies substantially by sector and by the nature of the work (Göbel & Zwick, 2012; Skirbekk, 2004). In the light of these findings, the recent literature has begun to view the ageing population not merely as a social security burden but as a source of human capital that can be mobilised through the right policies (Foster & Walker, 2015).

The policy dimension of the active ageing approach is becoming ever more strongly articulated with social security reforms. The OECD's comparative studies show that the early departure of older workers from the labour market generates substantial losses for individuals and economies alike, and that extending working life is possible only if working environments, wage structures, and skills policies are adapted in tandem (OECD, 2006; OECD, 2019). Micro-level comparisons have established that flexible transition models such as partial retirement, part-time work, and phased retirement can lighten the fiscal burden by reducing abrupt and early exits from the system (Gruber & Wise, 2004). Walker emphasises that active ageing in employment does not simply mean working longer; the nature of the work, training opportunities, and workplace arrangements must be adapted to older age groups (Walker, 2006). In a similar vein, Boudiny points out that interpreting the concept merely as the extension of working life risks turning it into empty rhetoric, and that if it is to become an effective policy tool it must also encompass the dimensions of care, volunteering, and social participation (Boudiny, 2013). It has been shown that in knowledge-intensive sectors older workers can make substantial experience-based contributions and that their adaptation to technology can be supported through appropriate training and job design (Czaja & Sharit, 2009). Skirbekk's subsequent work likewise indicates that the differentiation of productive capacity across age groups can be managed through policy design (Skirbekk, 2008). Frameworks that have turned healthy ageing into a global policy objective stress that improvements in health conditions are the precondition for extending working life (WHO, 2015; WHO, 2021), while research examining the contribution of population health to economic growth demonstrates that the lengthening of years spent in good health and in productive activity is one of the principal channels through which the adverse effects of demographic transformation can be mitigated (Bloom et al., 2018). This body of evidence explains why approaches that envisage preserving experience capital through roles such as mentoring, advisory work, and knowledge transfer are finding ever greater support in the literature (Foster & Walker, 2015; Harper, 2014).

Within the welfare state literature, the debate on the "new social risks" peculiar to the post-industrial era constitutes another strand that broadens the horizon regarding the scope of social security. According to this approach, the reconciliation of work and family life, single-parent households, the precariousness of low-skilled employment, and the need for long-term care have generated new areas of protection that did not appear on the risk map of the era for which classical social insurance was designed (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). The competitive and cost pressures that globalisation exerts on welfare states have deepened this transformation; the tension between pressures for the retrenchment

of social protection and societal demands has been examined in detail in the literature (Mishra, 1999). For developing countries this debate assumes a different aspect; studies examining the East Asian experience document distinctive models in which social policy is interwoven with poverty reduction and development strategies (Midgley & Tang, 2009). One of the most important dimensions of this debate for social security financing is women's labour force participation: while rising female employment broadens the contribution base, participation remains low in countries where care services and family policies are inadequate, and fertility decisions may also be adversely affected; comparative reports therefore treat flexible working and care-infrastructure policies that support work-family reconciliation as complements to pension reform (ILO, 2024; OECD, 2023). The health economics dimension completes the picture. In ageing populations, the spread of chronic diseases and the growing need for long-term care enlarge the share of health expenditures within the expenditure structure of social security systems (OECD, 2023; WHO, 2015). Research documenting the powerful relationship between social position and health outcomes shows that income insecurity deepens health inequalities, and that a reciprocal bond therefore exists between social protection and public health (Marmot, 2004). It is accepted that preventive health policies and healthy ageing programmes can improve both the revenue side, by enabling individuals to remain productive for longer, and the expenditure side, by containing care costs (Bloom et al., 2018; WHO, 2021). This body of knowledge establishes that social security sustainability is not confined to pension parameters; it requires an integrated policy field encompassing employment, family, care, and health policies.

The literature addressing the relationship between social security and economic security is of particular importance for the first link in the causal chain of this study. The social risk management approach establishes that the income-loss risks individuals face over the course of their lives are not merely personal problems; when they are not governed through mechanisms of prevention, mitigation, and coping, they generate societal and economic consequences (Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2001). Within this framework, social security systems function as institutional buffers that soften the impact of economic shocks in situations such as unemployment, illness, old age, and loss of working capacity. The reports of international organisations likewise support the role of social protection systems in reducing economic vulnerability, emphasising that universal social protection is one of the load-bearing pillars of the sustainable development goals (ILO, 2017; ILO, 2021; World Bank, 1994). The transformative social protection approach developed by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler argues, in turn, that protection strengthens not only income but also individuals' social position and access to rights, and that in this respect social protection is one of the constitutive elements of development (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). The global financial crisis and the pandemic period rendered the importance of this relationship more visible: in countries where social protection networks proved inadequate, the social cost of the crises grew heavier, whereas countries with strong systems were able to keep the effects of the contraction more limited (ILO, 2021). Conceptual frameworks developed on economic vulnerability and resilience support this observation as well, showing that an economy's degree of exposure to shocks and its capacity to absorb those shocks are different things, and that the latter depends largely on institutional and social policies (Briguglio et al., 2009). In the current

literature, therefore, social security is assessed not merely as a welfare instrument but as one of the institutional components of economic resilience; this assessment heightens the importance of studies examining the connection between social security and strategic state capacity.

The human security approach constitutes the principal conceptual ground on which social security meets the security literature. The concept of security itself passed through an intensive process of redefinition after the Cold War; it was shown that the concept can be analysed through the questions of which values are to be protected, against which threats, and for whom (Baldwin, 1997), and the widening of the security agenda beyond the military sector to encompass the economic, societal, and political sectors was given a systematic framework (Buzan et al., 1998). The concept of human security is one of the most influential expressions of this widening: the approach, which counts dimensions such as economic security, food security, health security, and personal security among the essential components of security, positions the protection of the individual from fundamental risks not as the opposite of state security but as its precondition (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). Critical voices are not absent from within the approach: Paris argued that drawing the boundaries of the concept too widely weakens its analytical value (Paris, 2001), and this critique gave rise to proposals aimed at rendering human security measurable through threshold-based definitions grounded in the severity of vital risks (Owen, 2004). Newman, for his part, contends that critical human security studies illuminate the blind spots of the traditional security understanding by rendering visible the connection between economic insecurity and political fragility (Newman, 2010). The common denominator of these debates is the finding that the expansion of social groups unable to meet their basic needs and left unprotected against the risk of income loss erodes societal and political stability over the long run (Commission on Human Security, 2003). It is precisely at this point that social security systems come into play, for they are the most widespread and most inclusive mechanisms institutionalising economic security. The tendency of economically protected individuals to place higher trust in the social and political system forms the basis of the indirect bond between social protection and regime stability. Sen's capabilities approach strengthens this bond from another angle, establishing that insecurity narrows individuals' sphere of freedom and thereby disrupts development itself (Sen, 1999). This conceptual accumulation supplies the foundations of the thesis that social security produces not only welfare but also security, and it prepares a theoretical ground for the conceptual framework to be developed in the following section.

The concept of societal resilience constitutes another pillar of the bridge between social security and domestic stability. Resilience is generally defined as the capacity of societies to withstand economic, social, or political crises and to recover from them; some authors treat the concept as a new governance paradigm concerned with the management of complexity (Chandler, 2014). The disaster and crisis management literature shows that resilience is an institutional quality that can be designed in advance, and that structures of preparedness, coordination, and resources largely determine performance at the moment of crisis (Comfort et al., 2010). The influential model of Norris and colleagues conceptualises community resilience as a set of interlinked capacities comprising economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence (Norris et al., 2008). Aldrich's

comparative studies of post-disaster recovery processes have demonstrated empirically that communities with strong social networks and relations of trust emerge from crises more quickly (Aldrich, 2012); subsequent work has systematised this link between social capital and community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). Social security systems play a twofold role in this picture: on the one hand they prevent the collapse of households by providing income support at the moment of crisis; on the other, they strengthen the state-society bond by institutionalising the expectation that individuals will not be left alone in hard times. The criticisms directed at the resilience literature are nevertheless noteworthy; Joseph warns that the concept may turn into a neoliberal technique of government that shifts responsibility from the state onto the individual and the community (Joseph, 2013). This critique is important as a reminder that resilience must be built upon public protection mechanisms, not in place of them. When the reciprocal relationship between institutional trust and resilience is taken into account, the conclusion is reached that social security systems affect not only individual welfare but also social cohesion and political stability.

Studies directly examining the relationship between social security, social trust, and domestic stability are also multiplying. Social trust is associated with the level of confidence individuals place both in one another and in public institutions, and it is regarded as the core component of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Work on the moral foundations of trust shows that generalised trust is nourished by equality and optimism, whereas deep inequalities erode it (Uslaner, 2002). The important finding of Kumlin and Rothstein is that the design of welfare institutions has a direct effect on trust: contact established through universal services nourishes social trust, whereas contact established through stigmatising, means-tested practices can erode it (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005). It has likewise been shown comparatively that universal programmes create a mutually reinforcing cycle among equality, low corruption, and social trust (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). That trust among citizens cannot be conceived independently of the institutional environment, and that fairly and impartially functioning institutions are the precondition of trust production, has also been worked out at the theoretical level (Offe, 1999; Rothstein, 1998). Comparative findings showing that income inequality is associated with social problems across a wide spectrum ranging from health to crime indirectly support the contribution that inequality-limiting social security institutions make to social integration (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Conversely, observations that social tensions rise in periods when income security is eroded accord with studies arguing that inequality also corrupts the functioning of the political system (Stiglitz, 2012). One of the classic texts of the legitimacy debate foresaw much earlier that the widening of the gap between the promises of the welfare state and its capacity to fulfil them could lead to a legitimisation crisis in late capitalist societies (Habermas, 1975). That rising trust in the state produces favourable outcomes in many fields, from tax compliance to voluntary cooperation, has also been established in the institutionalist literature (Levi, 1998). Read together, these findings reveal a consistent pattern: social security systems capable of offering citizens security about the future nourish social trust, and social trust in turn nourishes domestic stability. Domestic stability here does not mean merely the preservation of public order; it also encompasses economic predictability, institutional trust, and the continuity of political legitimacy (Rosanvallon, 2011).

The state capacity literature supplies another body of knowledge that stands at the centre of the study's theoretical chain. The institutionalist turn that brought the state back to the centre of analysis emphasised that the state is not a simple reflection of social structures but an autonomous actor that shapes outcomes through its own organisational capacity (Skocpol, 1985). Mann's concept of infrastructural power is one of the keystones of this debate: the power of the modern state lies less in its monopoly of coercion than in its ability to penetrate the capillaries of society and implement policies (Mann, 1984). Evans's concept of embedded autonomy showed that successful states possess bureaucratic structures that are at once connected to society and autonomous from it (Evans, 1995); the relationship between Weberian bureaucratic structures and economic growth has also been confirmed empirically through cross-national comparisons (Evans & Rauch, 1999). Migdal, for his part, revealed how the policy-implementation capacity of states that remain weak in the face of strong societies is eroded (Migdal, 1988). In the political economy literature, Besley and Persson show that fiscal capacity and legal capacity develop together and rank among the constitutive conditions of long-run prosperity (Besley & Persson, 2009; Besley & Persson, 2011). Empirical studies tracing the historical roots of state capacity likewise confirm the link between capacity and long-run economic performance (Dincecco & Katz, 2016). Fukuyama's work on institutional development and political decay argues that strong institutions directly affect states' performance both nationally and internationally (Fukuyama, 2004; Fukuyama, 2014). Viewed through the concepts of this literature, social security institutions are among the most visible faces of state capacity, for the access of millions of people to pension, health, and social protection services depends directly on the registration, collection, payment, and audit capacity of public institutions. The quality of social security services, one of the areas in which citizens have their most frequent and most tangible contact with the state, directly shapes perceptions of state capacity and institutional trust (Rothstein, 2011).

That the relationship between social security and state capacity is bidirectional is being established ever more clearly in recent scholarship. On the one hand, strong administrative capacity is the precondition for the sound functioning of the social security system, from contribution collection to actuarial planning; on the other, an effectively functioning social security system consolidates state capacity by nourishing institutional trust and voluntary compliance (Levi, 1998; Rothstein, 1998). The empirical counterpart of this reciprocity is also becoming apparent: a recent panel study covering fifteen OECD countries shows that the adverse effect of population ageing on the sustainability of pension systems intensifies markedly in countries where government effectiveness is low, whereas in countries with high governance quality the same demographic pressure remains far more manageable (Cho & Lee, 2025). This finding explains why countries with similar demographic indicators produce different fiscal outcomes, and it establishes that sustainability is not a purely demographic destiny but is shaped by institutional capacity. The work of international social security organisations points in the same direction: the binding of actuarial work to institutional standards, together with advances in data infrastructure and digital service capacity, stands out among the instruments that strengthen both the financial management and the service quality of these systems (International Social Security Association [ISSA], 2022; ISSA, 2023). Observations that the loss of institutional trust and social

discontent are more frequent in societies where social security mechanisms have weakened are likewise consistent with this framework (Habermas, 1975; Stiglitz, 2012). By contrast, it is apparent that the mainstream of the state capacity literature focuses on indicators such as tax capacity, bureaucratic quality, and legal effectiveness, and that studies treating social protection capacity as a constitutive component of the capacity debate have remained comparatively limited (Besley & Persson, 2011; Fukuyama, 2014). This state of affairs opens space for holistic approaches that position social security systems as both an indicator and a producer of state capacity, and it constitutes one of the points of departure of the present study.

In the international relations literature, there is an extensive body of work on the factors determining states' foreign policy effectiveness. The classical realist tradition defined national power largely in terms of military and economic capacity (Morgenthau, 2005), while neorealist theory shifted the weight of explanation onto the structural features of the international system (Waltz, 1979). By contrast, approaches that brought the domestic structure of the state back into the analysis emphasise the difference between the magnitude of national resources and the state's actual ability to mobilise them. The effect on foreign policy preferences of the relationship between state strength and social structure was demonstrated at an early date in the classic studies of American foreign policy (Krasner, 1978). Zakaria's state-centred realism establishes that national power can produce foreign policy output only to the extent that it can be converted into state power, and that states with weak domestic institutional structures can remain ineffective despite abundant resources (Zakaria, 1998). Neoclassical realism systematised this line of argument, inserting intervening variables such as state capacity, elite perceptions, and state-society relations between systemic pressures and foreign policy behaviour (Ripsman et al., 2016; Rose, 1998). Schweller's theory of underbalancing is especially instructive in this regard: states with weak elite consensus, low social cohesion, and fragile governments prove unable to mobilise their resources and to produce the necessary balancing policies even in the face of manifest threats (Schweller, 2004). This direct link established between social cohesion and foreign policy capacity points to the strategic importance of institutions that nourish social cohesion. Taliaferro's analysis of the resource-extractive state likewise establishes that states unable to mobilise their domestic resources fall behind in long-term security competition (Taliaferro, 2006), and the edited volumes of the same tradition document the effect of domestic institutional structure on foreign policy outcomes through diverse case studies (Taliaferro et al., 2009). The grand strategy literature reaches a similar conclusion: when a balance cannot be struck between long-term strategic aims and the resources at hand, the coherence of foreign policy weakens (Brands, 2014). Kennedy's classic study of the rise and fall of the great powers demonstrated through historical examples that imbalance between resource commitments and the economic base leads to strategic decline; social spending obligations are among the items of this equation (Kennedy, 1987). Yet the greater part of this literature does not take social security systems directly as an object of analysis. Social security institutions are nevertheless among the fundamental structures affecting states' budget structures, levels of social stability, and institutional legitimacy; it appears possible that the permanent pressure which large deficits place on public resources could, over the long run, narrow the resources available for defence,

diplomacy, technology, and development investment. The scarcity of studies examining this relationship holistically constitutes one of the significant gaps in the field.

Studies on geostrategic power and the measurement of national power show that this gap can be filled with conceptual tools. The concept of power itself is treated within a relational framework; it has been established at the conceptual level that power does not consist of resources alone but depends on context and on the capacity for conversion (Baldwin, 2016). The national power literature considers a large number of variables together, including military capacity, economic size, technological sophistication, institutional effectiveness, and diplomatic skill; studies in the RAND tradition emphasise that in the post-industrial age power depends less on resources than on the national performance that converts those resources into output, and on state-society relations (Tellis et al., 2000). Even the quantitative power formulas of the Cold War era contained multipliers relating to national strategy and societal will; this approach shows how old the distinction between material capacity and the ability to employ it is within power analysis (Cline, 1994). Interdependence theory further eroded the purely military reading of power by showing that economic and social ties transform the workings of power relations (Keohane & Nye, 2012), while Nye's concept of soft power rendered visible the share of elements such as attractiveness, legitimacy, and institutional credibility in the production of power, and his later work developed the smart power approach combining hard and soft power instruments (Nye, 2004; Nye, 2011). The recognition that states today compete not only with military instruments but also with elements of economic and societal capacity is progressively turning power studies into an interdisciplinary field. Even so, research directly examining the effects of social security systems on the production of geostrategic power remains highly limited; the existing literature focuses on variables such as economic growth, military expenditure, or technological capacity, while the indirect effects of social security operating through state capacity and social stability are for the most part left outside the analysis. Yet the economic security, social trust, and institutional resilience supported by sustainable social security systems are counted among the long-term sources of national power (Nye, 2011; Tellis et al., 2000). The fact that the causal connections among social security sustainability, state capacity, domestic stability, foreign policy effectiveness, and geostrategic power have not been examined holistically defines the fundamental gap in the literature that this study aims to fill.

Comparative country experiences offer a rich body of evidence on the conditions under which sustainability reforms succeed. Studies examining the politics of pension reform show that reforms depend as much on institutional structure and processes of social negotiation as on technical design, and that in systems with many veto points consensual, incremental reforms come to the fore (Bonoli, 2000). Comparative studies of the pressure that integration with global markets places on welfare states likewise establish that reform paths diverge according to parties, institutions, and production regimes (Huber & Stephens, 2001). In countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark, the linking of the retirement age to increases in life expectancy has endowed the systems with automatic adjustment mechanisms (OECD, 2023). Sweden's notional defined contribution model is frequently cited as an original design that embeds actuarial discipline within a pay-as-you-go system (Holzmann

et al., 2012). The mix of public and private pension components varies greatly across countries, with the role of supplementary pillars taking shape in conjunction with the generosity of the public pillar (Queisser et al., 2007). Japan's healthy and active ageing policies exemplify a holistic approach that supports the participation of the older population in the labour force and in social life (WHO, 2015). Norway, for its part, is among the countries providing long-term financing support for pension obligations through a national reserve fund (OECD, 2023). Studies comparing the waves of reform across OECD countries establish that the common tendency is a search for balance between fiscal sustainability and an adequate level of protection, that no single uniform model exists, and that each country develops solutions suited to its own demographic, economic, and institutional conditions (Whiteford & Whitehouse, 2006). The point particularly emphasised in the literature is that successful reforms are not exclusively savings-oriented; studies systematising the principles of reform state explicitly that reforms which disregard welfare objectives and fail to win social acceptance do not produce sustainable results over the long run (Barr & Diamond, 2009). Analyses showing that retrenching the welfare state is politically far more difficult than expanding it likewise indicate that reforms require political strategies such as blame-sharing and compensation mechanisms (Pierson, 2001). The common lesson of comparative experience is that sustainable systems rest on the triad of strong institutional capacity, long-term planning, and social legitimacy.

Studies on Türkiye show that the problems facing the social security system largely coincide with international trends. Research examining Türkiye's demographic transformation establishes that the decline in fertility and the rise in life expectancy is part of a long-standing structural process (Koç et al., 2010), and current official data confirm that the share of the older population is increasing rapidly (Turkish Statistical Institute [TÜİK], 2024). Türkiye's welfare regime is also instructive from the standpoint of comparative typologies: with a structure in which the family and informal solidarity play a strong role and in which social protection is stratified according to employment status, Türkiye bears significant resemblances to the Southern European welfare model (Ferrera, 1996), and the transformation of this structure has been examined in detail in the specific context of Türkiye (Buğra & Keyder, 2006). Informal employment and the structural problems of the labour market weaken the financing structure of the system by narrowing the contribution base (Alper, 2016; Alper, 2021). The comprehensive reform carried out in the period 2006-2008 aimed to strengthen the institutional integrity of the system by uniting three separate social insurance institutions under a single roof and by establishing universal health insurance (Güzel et al., 2022). Debates over the fiscal balance nevertheless continue: transfers from the central budget to the Social Security Institution have for many years been one of the significant items of public finance, and recent econometric findings show that these transfers increase the budget deficit, the borrowing requirement, and the debt stock (Cural, 2016; Mıynat Taşdemir, 2025). Differing emphases exist in the literature regarding the causes of this picture. Some studies argue that past practices, particularly the early retirement arrangements that remained in force for a long time, have been as decisive as demographic change (Acar & Kitapcı, 2008; Açmaz, n.d.); the legal-institutional debates over the retirement age likewise continue along this axis within the social security law literature (Sözer, 2019; Tuncay, 2012). Expert theses prepared in the field of

social security also examine topics such as second-pillar pensions, flexible retirement, and active ageing in detail with respect to the Turkish case, offering rich institutional material for the search for alternative models (Ağören, n.d.; Göçmez, n.d.; Hatam, n.d.; Kardeş, n.d.; Moğulkoç, n.d.; Yeniçerioğlu, n.d.). Official analyses of the actuarial outlook of public pension systems likewise provide projections concerning the medium- and long-term liabilities of the system (Presidency of Strategy and Budget [Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı], 2022). While other research foregrounds informal employment and the low contribution base (Ocak, 2012), analyses of the actuarial balance draw attention to the fact that practices such as service-period debt purchase and contribution amnesties have disturbed the system's benefit-burden equilibrium (Yaşarlar, 2016). The rise in health expenditures is also monitored among the factors enlarging the pressure on the expenditure side of the system (Social Security Institution [SGK], 2024). This body of evidence establishes that the social security problem in Türkiye cannot be reduced to a single cause; what is at issue is a multi-layered structure in which demographic, economic, institutional, and political factors are interwoven.

Although the centre of gravity of the Turkish literature long remained on fiscal sustainability and actuarial balance, the number of studies jointly assessing the economic and social effects of the system has been rising in recent years. The effects of social policy on income distribution, the fight against poverty, and social integration are being examined ever more extensively within the framework of welfare regime debates (Buğra, 2019), and comprehensive works systematising the conceptual framework of the welfare state and the principal fields of social policy within the Turkish-language literature are likewise strengthening the accumulated knowledge in this field (Özdemir, 2017; Tokol & Alper, 2014). In the public administration literature, the organisation, service delivery, and administrative capacity of social security institutions are treated within the context of the general transformation of Turkish public administration (Aydın, 2022; Gözübüyük & Tan, 2021); the constitutional foundations of social security and the role of local governments in the field of social protection likewise constitute a separate subject of inquiry (Bayraktaroğlu, n.d.; Küçük, n.d.). Field-based data on Türkiye's demographic transformation make it possible to monitor the long-term effects of fertility and ageing trends on the system (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies [Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü], 2018). At the intersection of these two strands, the relationship between service quality and institutional trust comes to the fore: studies of comparative governance indicators show that perceptions of the effectiveness of public services are among the core components of measurements of government effectiveness and carry strong signals about countries' institutional performance (Kaufmann et al., 2010). Findings that the quality of government, low perceptions of corruption, and impartial service delivery nourish social trust complete this framework (Rothstein, 2011). The digitalisation initiatives carried out in social security services in Türkiye in recent years have eased access to services and shortened processing times; this transformation, which can be tracked in the institution's activity reports, may be regarded — in a manner consistent with the assessments of international social security organisations concerning digital capacity — as one of the indicators of state capacity reflected in citizens' daily lives (ISSA, 2022; SGK, 2024). When the

international findings that improvements in citizen satisfaction can support institutional trust, and that institutional trust in turn can support social cohesion and social stability, are taken into account, it becomes apparent that the relationship between social security and state capacity produces not only theoretical but also observable practical consequences in the Turkish context (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Rothstein, 2011).

When the existing literature is assessed as a whole, it is apparent that a robust body of knowledge has formed regarding each individual link of the chain. There are solid findings that social security systems support economic security (Barr, 2020; Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2001). That economic security contributes to human security and societal resilience is widely accepted (Chandler, 2014; UNDP, 1994). The bond between societal resilience, social capital, and institutional trust has been documented empirically (Aldrich, 2012; Norris et al., 2008). Findings that institutional trust nourishes state capacity and that state capacity strengthens domestic stability form the main body of the institutionalist literature (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2004; Rothstein, 2011). The relationship between domestic capacity and foreign policy effectiveness, in turn, has been worked out theoretically and empirically within the neoclassical realist tradition (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2004; Taliaferro, 2006; Zakaria, 1998). By contrast, studies uniting all of these variables within a single causal chain along the axis of social security sustainability are almost non-existent; the social security literature and the literatures on state capacity, security studies, and international relations proceed largely in isolation from one another. This disconnection constitutes a significant theoretical gap that prevents the strategic consequences of social security reforms from being seen systematically. The present study aims to fill this gap; it conceptualises social security not merely as an instrument of welfare policy but as a strategic institution connected with state capacity and the production of geostrategic power. In this way it is intended to build a new bridge between the social security literature and the literatures on state capacity, security studies, and international relations. The fundamental conclusion established by the literature review is that this interdisciplinary relationship needs to be examined within a systematic theoretical framework; the theoretical framework of the study is developed along these lines in the following section.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section sets out the theoretical foundations on which the study rests and the explanatory model developed from them. The theoretical point of departure is the assumption that social security systems are not merely financial mechanisms for paying retirement pensions, but rank among the strategic institutions that shape the long-term capacity of states. In the literature, social security has mostly been examined through the lenses of the welfare state, income distribution, the fight against poverty and social protection functions (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Barr, 2020). The link between financial sustainability and state capacity, by contrast, has received comparatively little attention. Yet modern states generate their social legitimacy largely through the guarantees they offer their citizens. People's ability to face the future with confidence is tightly bound to the stability of pension and health systems. The financial soundness of social security institutions nourishes trust in public authority; trust in public institutions, in turn, directly affects the state's power to implement policy (Fukuyama, 1995; Rothstein, 2011). For this reason, social security sustainability should not be read as a mere budgetary indicator.

It is also one of the important determinants of institutional resilience, social trust and political stability. The study's central claim crystallises at this point: the financial sustainability of the social security system strengthens state capacity; strengthened state capacity supports domestic stability; and domestic stability, in turn, prepares the ground for foreign policy decisions to be implemented more effectively. A multi-layered and powerful, if indirect, relationship thus emerges between social security and geostrategic power. The conceptual model developed to explain this relationship is constructed link by link in the paragraphs that follow; the working mechanism of each link is discussed together with its boundary conditions and possible counterarguments.

For the model to be built on solid ground, the boundaries of the core concepts must first be drawn. In this study, financial sustainability is defined as the ability of a social security system to meet its current and future obligations from its own revenue sources over the long run, without creating a permanent and growing burden on public finances. This definition rests not on short-term budget balance but on actuarial balance, that is, the long-term alignment between contribution revenues and pension and health expenditures (Holzmann & Hinz, 2005). State capacity denotes the state's ability to raise resources, produce public services, set rules and implement its decisions across the national territory (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2004). This ability finds its counterpart in Mann's (1984) concept of infrastructural power; the state's power to penetrate society and carry its policies into everyday life is distinct from, and often more decisive than, its capacity for sheer coercion. That the state should be treated as an autonomous and effective actor in this sense has long been argued in the institutionalist literature (Skocpol, 1985). Domestic stability, in this study, describes the condition in which social peace, institutional trust, economic predictability and political order can be sustained together. Foreign policy effectiveness is the degree to which a state attains its international objectives and produces the outcomes it seeks in its external environment. Geostrategic power, finally, refers to the capacity to convert economic, institutional and societal resources into foreign policy outcomes; that national power cannot be reduced to a single indicator but is a multidimensional composite is widely accepted in the literature on the measurement of power (Cline, 1994; Tellis et al., 2000; Baldwin, 2016). Defining the concepts in this way clarifies from the outset the plane on which the causal chain constructed in the following paragraphs operates.

The first pillar of the theoretical framework is the welfare state approach. Within this tradition, social security is regarded as one of the constitutive elements of modern citizenship. Marshall (1992) argued that social rights, following civil and political rights, complete the status of citizenship by protecting the individual against market risks. Studies of the maturation and retrenchment phases of the welfare state show that once social programmes are established, they generate strong societal ownership and are therefore not easily rolled back (P. Pierson, 2001). The finding known as the paradox of redistribution is also important here: encompassing systems that embrace society as a whole, rather than narrowly targeted programmes aimed only at the poor, both reduce poverty more effectively and enlarge public support for the programmes (Korpi & Palme, 1998). It has been shown empirically that inclusive and fairly functioning welfare institutions nourish social trust, whereas discriminatory or arbitrary institutions erode it (Rothstein, 1998; Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005). The guarantees provided

by the welfare state are, moreover, closely bound up with the legitimacy of the political system. It has been argued that the capitalist state derives its legitimacy largely from its ability to meet social demands, and that legitimacy problems deepen in periods when this ability weakens (Habermas, 1975; Offe, 1984). Contemporary democratic theory further emphasises that legitimacy is produced not only through elections but also through the everyday performance of institutions (Rosanvallon, 2011). This body of work removes social security systems from the status of a technical topic within social policy; it turns them into one of the load-bearing columns of the relationship of trust and legitimacy between state and society.

At the centre of the model lies the relationship between social security and state capacity. The first channel of this relationship is fiscal in nature. Large-scale and persistent deficits in social security systems cause budget transfers to the system to grow year after year (Holzmann & Hinz, 2005; OECD, 2023). Every additional resource transferred from the budget to social security narrows the share available for education, health infrastructure, technology, defence and diplomacy. This squeeze on public finances weakens the state's fiscal room for manoeuvre, that is, its flexibility to shift resources in the face of unexpected developments. The link between fiscal capacity and general state capacity has been firmly established in the economics literature: states with a strong ability to collect taxes and contributions also perform better in developing legal institutions, regulating markets and undertaking long-term investment (Besley & Persson, 2009, 2011). Historical data show that fiscally strong and centralised states display markedly better long-run economic performance (Dincecco & Katz, 2016). Read in reverse, these findings suggest that a social security system generating chronic deficits can become a force that gnaws away at the fiscal foundations of state capacity. By contrast, a system in sound actuarial balance eases the pressure on public finances and allows the state to direct more resources to its strategic priorities. Within this framework, the financial structure of the social security system should be assessed not merely as a social policy indicator but as one of the infrastructural elements of state power.

The second channel between social security and state capacity is administrative and informational in nature. Social security institutions operate on vast data infrastructures in which millions of workers, workplaces and pensioners are registered. Effective contribution collection encourages the expansion of registered employment; rising formality, in turn, increases the visibility of economic activity to the state. The state's ability to know, measure and register society is one of the most fundamental components of modern state capacity, and institutional economics counts this ability among the preconditions of long-run development (North, 1990). It has also been shown through cross-national comparisons that merit-based and predictable bureaucratic structures have a positive effect on economic growth (Evans & Rauch, 1999). The social security administration performs a double function in this respect: on the one hand it runs the state's most extensive service network, reaching the widest population; on the other it mediates the sound management of the tax and contribution base. In the Turkish case, the unification of the Social Security Institution under a single roof and the digitalisation of its services are among the concrete manifestations of this administrative capacity. When the institution's financial sustainability weakens, it is not only payments that are put at risk;

frequently changing rules, expectations of amnesties and debt restructuring, and slackening contribution discipline also erode this informational foundation of administrative capacity. The fiscal channel and the administrative channel thus feed each other, and together they form the trunk of the connection running from social security to state capacity.

The next link in the chain is the relationship between social welfare and domestic stability. Income security, access to health services and the preservation of living standards in old age reduce society's sense of uncertainty about the future (Barr & Diamond, 2008). The reduction of uncertainty does not merely bring individual relief; by making consumption, saving and investment decisions more predictable, it also regulates the general rhythm of economic life. Comparative data show that in societies where inequalities are relatively low, a wide range of social indicators, from health to crime rates, fare better (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). It has also been forcefully argued that deepening inequality frays the social fabric, magnifies anger towards the political system and threatens stability in the long run (Stiglitz, 2012). Societies with high stocks of trust and social capital are likewise known to develop more effective cooperation in the face of common problems (Putnam, 2000). The social policy literature has further emphasised that social protection programmes can perform a transformative function, strengthening not only income but also social standing and dignity (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). The conclusion that emerges from this body of work is clear: social security systems are, beyond being financial structures that transfer income, among the invisible support mechanisms of social cohesion and domestic peace. The financial credibility of the system is the precondition for this supportive function to continue without interruption; doubts about its ability to pay can weaken the psychological assurance the system provides even before deficits actually grow.

The theoretical basis of the link between domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness is found most clearly in neoclassical realism within the international relations literature. Structural realism explains state behaviour essentially by reference to the anarchic structure of the international system and the distribution of power, allowing limited room for domestic factors (Waltz, 1979). Neoclassical realists argue instead that the pressures and opportunities emanating from the system are translated into foreign policy behaviour only after passing through domestic political and institutional filters (Rose, 1998; Ripsman et al., 2016). Foremost among these filters is the state's ability to extract resources from society, that is, to collect taxes, mobilise manpower and preserve social consent (Taliaferro, 2006). Zakaria (1998) demonstrated through the American experience that national wealth does not automatically translate into foreign policy power; this conversion requires a strong state apparatus securing the state's access to societal resources. Schweller (2004), in turn, showed that countries in which elite consensus has dissolved and social cleavages have deepened fail to produce the necessary balancing policies even in the face of manifest threats. The idea that domestic order underpins external power is not new; classical realism, too, counted national morale and the quality of government among the essential elements of national power (Morgenthau, 2005). This body of scholarship provides fertile ground for the connection established in this study: to the extent that social security systems help preserve social consent and the state's resource-extraction capacity, they indirectly nourish the domestic conditions of foreign policy effectiveness.

The Geostrategic Social Security Theory that rises on these theoretical foundations is constructed as an interdisciplinary model aimed at explaining the connection between social security sustainability and the production of national power. The theory can be defined as an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that explains the causal relationship between the financial sustainability of a state's social security system and its capacity to generate geostrategic power. The approach draws on three distinct bodies of scholarship and adds a contribution to each: from the human security literature it takes the definition of security broadened beyond military threats; from welfare state theory, the legitimacy- and trust-producing function of social institutions; and from neoclassical realism, the logic by which domestic factors are transmitted into foreign policy. Its originality lies in uniting these three strands within a single explanatory framework organised around social security sustainability. The independent variable of the model is the financial sustainability of the social security system. The ultimate dependent variable is the state's capacity to generate geostrategic power. The relationship between the two operates through a transmission chain of seven interlocking links: financial sustainability supports economic security; economic security strengthens human security; human security enhances societal resilience; societal resilience nourishes institutional trust; institutional trust facilitates the effective use of state capacity; state capacity consolidates domestic stability; and domestic stability contributes, through foreign policy effectiveness, to the production of geostrategic power. Social welfare, which appears as an intervening variable in the study's central hypothesis, operates in this chain not as a separate link but as a cross-cutting dimension carried within the economic security and human security links and opening onto domestic stability; the section thus proceeds in full continuity with the conceptual construction set out in the introduction. Each link of the chain rests on relationships tested separately in the literature; the originality of the model stems from bringing these links together within a single explanatory framework. The point to be underlined is that the relationships in the chain are probabilistic rather than deterministic. Each link produces favourable conditions that raise the likelihood of the next link emerging; whether these conditions translate into outcomes also depends on factors such as political choices, the quality of governance and the external conjuncture. The paragraphs that follow examine the working mechanism of each link in turn.

The first link of the chain is the relationship between financial sustainability and economic security. Economic security describes the condition in which individuals possess an income sufficient to meet their basic needs and enjoy predictability regarding the future; deprivation and insecurity, by contrast, are among the fundamental losses of freedom that narrow a person's capabilities (Sen, 1999). In modern societies, the most important institutional instrument of this security is the social security system. Workers contribute to the system throughout their lives and obtain predefined guarantees in situations such as old age, illness, occupational injury, maternity and incapacity for work. The social risk management approach has set out in detail that social protection systems are among the most comprehensive instruments for managing the income risks faced by individuals and households (Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2001). That the destructive effects of economic shocks on households remain more limited in countries with strong social protection networks has also been confirmed by data from

the pandemic period (ILO, 2021). What is decisive here is not merely the existence of guarantees on paper, but the societal conviction that the system will be able to honour these guarantees in the future as well. A system that does not appear financially sustainable cannot fulfil its trust function in people's planning for the future, even if the protection it promises remains unchanged. For this reason, the model positions economic security as the first and most immediate output of social security sustainability.

The second link connects economic security and human security. The human security approach was developed as an objection to the traditional understanding that reduces security to military threats; it counted freedom from fear and freedom from want among the essential components of security (UNDP, 1994). In this approach, economic security constitutes one of the seven dimensions of human security, alongside food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. The view that institutional arrangements protecting the vital core of people's lives are also a precondition of state security occupies a prominent place in this literature (Commission on Human Security, 2003; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Criticisms that excessive broadening of the concept may weaken its analytical value are well known (Paris, 2001); in response, it has been considered possible to render the concept measurable by developing threshold-based definitions (Owen, 2004). Even critical approaches accept that the empirical link between economic insecurity and political fragility is strong (Newman, 2010). Social security systems stand at the centre of this picture, because they institutionally cover a substantial share of the risks threatening human security, namely being left without income in old age, being unable to access treatment in illness, and falling into poverty upon incapacity for work. In the model of this study, social security sustainability is accepted as the structural element carrying the economic pillar of human security; the strengthening of human security, in turn, prepares the ground for the next link, which extends to societal resilience.

The third link concerns the relationship between human security and societal resilience. Societal resilience refers to a society's capacity to adapt to crises, to recover from shocks and to maintain its essential functions; it has been shown that this capacity is composed of interconnected elements such as economic resources, social capital, information flows and community competence (Norris et al., 2008). It has also been demonstrated that the vulnerability of economic structures to external shocks, and their ability to absorb them, can be measured, and that resilience can be built through deliberate policies (Briguglio et al., 2009). Research on post-disaster recovery shows that social networks and trust in institutions are among the most decisive factors in the speed of recovery (Aldrich, 2012). Social security systems contribute to the formation of this capacity in two directions. On the one hand, they partially compensate income losses at the moment of crisis and prevent the collapse of households; on the other, thanks to the stock of trust accumulated before the crisis, they preserve society's inclination to cooperate with the state. For the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed and low-income groups this protection is vital, because the weakest links of the resilience chain are most often precisely these groups. It has been emphasised that resilience is not merely the ability to react in the moment, but also includes long-term adaptive capacity (Chandler, 2014). The financial sustainability of the social security system is precisely the carrier of this long-term adaptation; a protection network that continues

to function in the midst of crisis is resilience in institutionalised form. It should also be noted, however, that resilience discourse has been criticised for potentially turning into a technique of government that shifts responsibility from the state to the individual (Joseph, 2013); the usage in this study treats resilience not as an individual burden but as a shared capacity built through public protection networks.

The fourth link is the bond between societal resilience and institutional trust. Institutional trust denotes citizens' belief that state institutions operate fairly, effectively and predictably; it has been shown that this belief is nourished by a cumulative assessment of the past performance of institutions (Levi, 1998). Social security institutions are among the foremost arenas in which citizens encounter the state most frequently and most concretely. Pensions paid on time, uninterrupted access to health services and rules that do not change constantly are the everyday sources of institutional trust. Comparative research has established that universal and fairly operating welfare institutions increase both trust in institutions and people's trust in one another, whereas stigmatising, arbitrary or unreliable programmes erode trust (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005). Studies examining the moral foundations of generalised trust likewise confirm the role of equality and fair institutions in the production of trust (Uslaner, 2002). It has also been argued theoretically that people's ability to trust one another passes largely through the reliability of shared institutions (Offe, 1999). The observation that trust is one of the invisible forms of capital underlying economic and political performance completes this picture (Fukuyama, 1995). Drawing on this body of work, the model positions institutional trust as the intervening variable through which societal resilience is converted into state capacity: protection networks that continue to operate in crises enlarge the stock of trust, and the enlarged stock of trust prepares a base of social consent for the state's subsequent undertakings.

The fifth link runs from institutional trust to state capacity. The institutionalist approach holds that the success of states cannot be explained solely by the material resources they possess; rules, organisations and the order of expectations they create are decisive (North, 1990). Historical comparisons have shown that inclusive institutions, that is, structures that incorporate broad segments of society into the economic and political process, are the fundamental condition of long-run prosperity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Social security systems are among the largest-scale examples of inclusive institutions; they bring workers, civil servants, artisans and farmers together in a common protection network and establish an institutionalised bond of solidarity between different segments of society. In societies with high levels of trust, the cost of implementing public policies falls; voluntary tax compliance rises, resistance to rules diminishes, and the state's expenditure on monitoring and enforcement recedes. It has been shown that willingness to pay taxes is directly connected to the conviction that the state is trustworthy and will act fairly (Levi, 1998; Besley & Persson, 2009). The same logic holds for contribution collection: insured persons who trust the future of the system maintain contribution discipline, whereas flight into informality accelerates when trust is shaken. A self-reinforcing loop thus emerges between trust and fiscal capacity. When the finding that meritocratic bureaucracies raise economic performance is added (Evans & Rauch, 1999), the conclusion follows that institutional trust strengthens both the fiscal and the administrative dimensions of state capacity.

The sixth link concerns the relationship between state capacity and domestic stability. Strong state capacity does not mean merely possessing sophisticated institutional structures; these structures must also be able to operate on a foundation of social support and legitimacy (Fukuyama, 2014). The mutually formative character of the relationship between state and society shows that state capacity cannot be conceived independently of the social fabric (Migdal, 1988). High-capacity states can deliver public services without interruption, manage crises at an early stage and engage in long-term planning. These abilities narrow the gap between social expectations and state performance, preventing the accumulation of political tension. In the specific case of social security this relationship can be observed concretely: the timely payment of pensions and the continued functioning of the health system constitute the most visible form of state performance in the daily life of the broad masses. The continuation of this performance strengthens institutional legitimacy; its disruption can rapidly politicise discontent. When the share of pensioners, and of workers with pension expectations, within the total electorate is considered, the bond between social security performance and political stability becomes even more evident. The welfare state politics literature has shown that social reactions grow in periods when welfare institutions are disrupted, and that reform processes can be carried through only on the basis of broad consensus (P. Pierson, 2001; Bonoli, 2000). For this reason, the model treats domestic stability as the most critical intermediate output produced by state capacity, and regards social security sustainability as one of the factors determining the durability of that output.

The seventh and final link extends from domestic stability to foreign policy effectiveness and geostrategic power. States with strong domestic stability can take foreign policy decisions more consistently and stand behind the decisions they take. Where decision-makers carry no legitimacy concerns on the home front, foreign policy can orient itself towards long-term strategies rather than day-saving reactions (Rose, 1998; Zakaria, 1998). A fiscally relieved state can allocate more resources to defence modernisation, to its diplomatic network, to foreign aid programmes and to investment in technology. Geostrategic power emerges when these resources are converted into foreign policy outcomes. It is now accepted that national power is not confined to hard military elements; soft power, resting on the ability to attract and to set agendas, is also decisive in producing outcomes (Nye, 2004). It has been emphasised that the ability to convert power resources into outcomes is a capability distinct from the resources themselves and requires intelligent strategies (Nye, 2011). Studies on the measurement of national power likewise regard the state's capacity to extract resources from society and direct them towards its objectives as more important than the raw stock of resources (Tellis et al., 2000). A functioning and trustworthy social security system contributes to this picture in two directions: at home, it preserves the social foundation of the capacity to convert resources; abroad, it nourishes perceptions of the country's governance quality, lending indirect support to soft power through reputation and credibility. The chain as a whole thus completes the multi-layered transmission mechanism that begins with social security and reaches the production of geostrategic power.

For the model to be understood correctly, two caveats must be entered concerning the direction of causality. First, the relationships in the chain are not one-way; feedback loops operate in many of the links. Strong state capacity facilitates the establishment of sustainable social security systems, and

sustainable systems in turn nourish capacity. Likewise, institutional trust increases contribution compliance, rising compliance improves the financial balance, and the improved balance further consolidates trust. This circular structure allows the model to anticipate two opposing pathways together, in the form of a virtuous circle and a vicious circle: financial deterioration can trigger loss of trust, loss of trust can trigger informality, and informality can trigger deeper financial deterioration; conversely, a trust-inspiring reform can turn this spiral in a positive direction. The second caveat is that the relationships are conditional. The contribution of social security sustainability to state capacity strengthens in settings where the rule of law functions, where public administration possesses a minimum level of effectiveness and where political competition remains within institutional channels. In contexts lacking these conditions, even a financially balanced system may fail to produce the expected strategic outputs. Foreign policy effectiveness, moreover, is also nourished by factors outside the model, such as geography, alliance relationships and the international conjuncture. The model therefore does not present social security as the sole determinant of geostrategic power; it aims to render visible a channel of contribution that has hitherto been neglected in the literature and yet is effective.

Theoretical honesty requires that the counterarguments that may be levelled against the model also be discussed openly. The first counterargument is the resource competition thesis: since social expenditure and strategic expenditure are fed from the same budget, it may be claimed that every resource allocated to social security is taken away from defence and diplomacy. The imperial overstretch thesis, which attributes the decline of great powers to the gap between resources and commitments, also appears to lend historical support to this claim (Kennedy, 1987). Yet this objection overlooks the distinction between the level of spending and sustainability. The model takes as its independent variable not the size of social expenditure but the degree to which the system can meet its obligations from its own revenues. What truly consumes resources is not planned social protection but the unforeseeable and growing transfers that actuarially unbalanced systems draw from the budget. The second counterargument comes from labour economics: high contribution burdens can feed informality by taxing employment (Disney, 2004), and rules encouraging early retirement can depress labour force participation (Gruber & Wise, 1999). It has been shown, however, that well-designed reforms can improve both the financial balance and work incentives (Lindbeck & Persson, 2003). The model does not exclude these findings; on the contrary, it counts design quality as a condition of its own operation: sustainability can be established durably not by pruning rights but by strengthening the system's revenue base and incentive structure. The third counterargument holds that welfare retrenchment, too, can preserve stability; yet the welfare state politics literature shows that harsh and unilateral cuts produce loss of trust and social backlash, and that lasting reforms proceed only through broad agreement (P. Pierson, 2001; Bonoli, 2000). This discussion strengthens the understanding of balanced sustainability that the model defends.

The complementary component of the theoretical framework is the position of demographic transformation within the model. Many countries face ageing populations, falling fertility and lengthening life expectancy; the fiscal pressure of this transformation on pension and health systems

has been documented in detail (Lee & Mason, 2011; Harper, 2014; United Nations, 2022). Nevertheless, reading demographic change solely as a threat is an incomplete approach. New approaches to the measurement of ageing have developed the concept of prospective age, based on remaining life expectancy, and have shown that people of the same chronological age possess very different levels of health and functioning in different periods and different societies (Sanderson & Scherbov, 2010). This perspective reveals that ageing is not a fixed threshold but a boundary that shifts together with health and education conditions. International organisations have moved in the same direction, developing the active ageing framework, which envisages supporting older age groups in the dimensions of health, participation and security (WHO, 2002). It has been stressed that for the concept to be transformed from empty rhetoric into an effective policy instrument, participation must rest on voluntariness and equality of opportunity (Walker, 2002; Boudiny, 2013; Foster & Walker, 2015). The model of this study embraces active ageing; but it reinterprets it not merely as a social policy instrument but as a capacity policy connected to state capacity and the production of geostrategic power. In this interpretation, the ageing population is treated not simply as a source of expenditure pressure but as a reserve of human capital that can be mobilised through the right institutional design.

The empirical ground on which this interpretation rests consists of findings on the relationship between age and productivity. The assumption that productivity declines mechanically with chronological age is not supported by the research evidence. Comprehensive surveys examining the relationship between age and individual productivity show that results vary greatly according to occupation, type of task and method of measurement, and that older ages can carry a marked advantage in work where experience and accumulated knowledge weigh heavily (Skirbekk, 2004). Firm-level data likewise show that teams with mixed age structures display high productivity and that the productivity of older workers holds up better than commonly assumed (Göbel & Zwick, 2012). From the standpoint of human capital theory these findings are not surprising; knowledge, skills and experience accumulate like investment, and their returns extend over many years (Becker, 1993). It has also been shown that the real obstacles to working at older ages are not biological limits but institutional factors such as job design, adaptation to technology and age discrimination (Czaja & Sharit, 2009). International comparisons have established that longer and healthier-living generations remaining longer in working life generates gains for both individual welfare and public finances (OECD, 2006, 2019). This body of evidence provides the scientific basis for replacing the traditional view of old age as an economic burden with an approach that regards it as strategic human capital. Experience, institutional memory and problem-solving ability are, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors, stocks of accumulated capability on which state capacity can draw.

Building on this ground, the model proposes an approach termed Strategic Active Ageing. The essence of the approach is that the sharp separation between working life and retirement should be rethought under conditions of lengthening and healthier lives. In the classical model, the individual withdraws entirely from the production process at a certain age; accumulated knowledge and experience are left idle at a stroke. Yet it is known that in expertise-intensive fields this accumulation can be drawn upon

for far longer (OECD, 2019). Along these lines, the model incorporates into the theoretical discussion, as a long-term and hypothetical policy scenario, a differentiated retirement approach. According to this scenario, in societies where life expectancy has risen, health conditions have improved and active ageing policies have matured, graduated working models extending to age 70 for workers, 75 for public officials and 80 for certain fields requiring high expertise may enter among the options that can be considered. The aim here is not to force people to work longer; it is to establish flexible arrangements that continue to draw on the knowledge and experience of those who wish to work. The scenario therefore conceives the lengthening of working life together with the lightening of workload: part-time work, consultancy, mentoring and project-based assignments are the essential elements of this design. The preservation of different rules for those employed in arduous and exhausting occupations is an indispensable part of the scenario's justice dimension. Such a design contributes to the financial balance by improving the system's dependency ratio, while at the same time preventing welfare loss by preserving the individual's social participation and income. For the model, this approach is the mechanism demonstrating that the goals of sustainability and welfare are not opposites but, with the right design, complements of one another.

The welfare dimension of the model rests on the balance between sustainability and adequacy. A system that achieves financial balance by eroding pensions may appear sustainable on paper, yet it cannot produce the trust and stability outputs the model anticipates, because in that case the first link of the chain, economic security, has already failed to form. The practice of developed countries shows that pension systems aim not only at minimum subsistence but also at preserving a reasonable share of the living standard attained during working life (Barr & Diamond, 2008; OECD, 2023). In the approach adopted by this study, the ability of individuals who have contributed to the system for many years to live in decent conditions in retirement is both a requirement of equity and a strategic investment. Preserving pension adequacy supports domestic demand through pensioners' purchasing power; it lightens the pressure on social assistance spending by preventing descent into poverty; and, most importantly, by showing the active generations paying contributions that the promise made to them is being kept, it keeps the intergenerational contract of trust alive. Where this contract is damaged, the inclination of the young to move into informality strengthens, which narrows the financial base and triggers the vicious circle. In the model, therefore, adequacy is not the alternative to sustainability but its social precondition. The success of reform designs should be judged by whether they pursue these two goals together.

The theoretical framework can be translated into a set of propositions that meet the criterion of testability. According to the first proposition, as the actuarial balance of the social security system improves, the ratio of budget transfers to the system to national income falls and the state's fiscal room for manoeuvre widens. According to the second, the widening of fiscal space facilitates an increase in the resources allocated to strategic fields such as education, technology, defence and diplomacy. According to the third, the regular and predictable delivery of social security services raises institutional trust; the rise in institutional trust strengthens state capacity through contribution compliance and registered employment. According to the fourth, countries with strong state capacity

and social protection display lower levels of domestic instability in periods of economic and political crisis. According to the fifth, states with high domestic stability exhibit greater consistency and continuity in their foreign policy objectives. According to the sixth, there is an indirect and positive relationship between social security sustainability and indicators of geostrategic power, operating through the intervening variables enumerated. These six propositions constitute the theoretical counterpart of the central hypothesis and the auxiliary research questions set out in the introduction; the first two propositions correspond to the fiscal transmission mechanism, the third and fourth to the connection between state capacity and domestic stability, and the fifth and sixth to the foreign policy and geostrategic power dimension. Each of the propositions is testable through cross-country comparisons or time-series analyses once appropriate indicators are defined; actuarial deficit ratios, governance and trust indices, measures of political stability and data on foreign policy outcomes are the principal sources that can be used for this purpose. The systematic falsification of any one of the propositions would weaken the corresponding link of the model; this openness shows that the framework is not a dogmatic claim but a scientific model open to testing.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework developed in this section moves beyond traditional approaches that treat the financial sustainability of social security systems solely through the lens of social policy or public finance. Geostrategic Social Security Theory connects sustainability to the production of geostrategic power through a transmission chain passing through the links of economic security, human security, societal resilience, institutional trust, state capacity, domestic stability and foreign policy effectiveness; by discussing this chain together with its feedback loops, boundary conditions and counterarguments, it offers a realistic explanatory model. The complementary component of the framework, the Strategic Active Ageing approach, shows how demographic transformation can be lifted out of the status of a mere threat and converted into a source of capacity through graduated working models operating on the basis of voluntariness and flexibility. Within this whole, social security is positioned, beyond being an institution of the welfare state, as one of the load-bearing elements of the state's long-term strategic capacity. The testable propositions produced by the framework will guide the research method adopted in the following sections and the interpretation of the findings; the bond between theoretical claims and empirical assessment will thus be preserved.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is designed as a qualitative inquiry of an explanatory and theory-building character. Qualitative research is a research tradition that seeks to understand phenomena in depth, holistically and within their own context, resting on the interpretation of data gathered through techniques such as observation, interviewing, and document review (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The principal reason for adopting a qualitative approach in this study is that the subject under examination is too multi-layered to be explained by numbers alone. The relationship between the financial sustainability of social security systems and state capacity, domestic stability, and foreign policy effectiveness becomes visible only when the accumulated knowledge of several disciplines is read together. Qualitative research concentrates on questions of “how” and “why” rather than “how much”, allowing the researcher to interpret the patterns of relationship among phenomena within their context (Baltacı,

2019). Since the purpose of this study is to explain how the chain of relationships extending from social security sustainability to geostrategic power operates, the research design was constructed in accordance with this purpose. The research was conducted in line with the research questions posed in the introduction and the propositions developed in the theoretical framework; every stage of the method was designed to generate answers to these questions. In this respect, the study is not an empirical investigation running statistical tests on a particular sample; it is a study that rereads the existing theoretical and empirical literature in order to propose a new explanatory model and thereby to contribute to theory building.

The qualitative tradition embraces a variety of designs, including phenomenology, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory. The phenomenological design focuses on uncovering the essence of individuals' lived experiences and typically rests on in-depth interview data (Tekindal & Uğuz Arsu, 2020). Because the unit examined in this research is not individual experience but structural relations at the level of the state, the phenomenological design was not considered appropriate; a document-based, theory-oriented design was adopted instead. At the same time, the study did not confine itself to verbal and conceptual material; numerical data such as official statistics, actuarial indicators, and international indices were also used in a supporting capacity. Combining qualitative and quantitative data reduces the shortcomings inherent in any single type of data and strengthens the explanatory power of research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021; Butgel Tunalı et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this study is not a mixed-methods investigation in the full sense, since in mixed-methods research quantitative and qualitative data are collected in separate processes, analysed separately, and then systematically integrated (Toraman, 2021). Here, numerical indicators functioned not as an independent strand of analysis but as auxiliary elements that supported and tested the qualitative assessments. This choice preserved the predominantly qualitative structure of the research while reinforcing the connection between the interpretations reached and numerical reality.

The data of the study were collected through document review. Document review is a method of data collection and analysis that involves the systematic screening, evaluation, and interpretation of written materials containing information on the subject under investigation (Bowen, 2009; Kırıl, 2020). The documents examined were gathered under four main groups. The first group consists of books and peer-reviewed journal articles published in Turkish and English in the fields of social security, pension policy, active ageing, state capacity, human security, and foreign policy effectiveness. The second group comprises Turkish social security legislation together with the activity reports, statistical yearbooks, and actuarial assessments of the Social Security Institution. The third group is made up of the reports and databases of international organisations such as the OECD, the ILO, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (OECD, 2023; ILO, 2021; WHO, 2021). The fourth group contains national policy documents such as development plans, medium-term programmes, and public finance reports. In selecting the documents, priority was given to sources produced predominantly in the 1990–2025 period and published by recognised publishing houses, peer-reviewed journals, or official institutions; for the small number of classic works underpinning the theoretical foundation, this time limit was applied flexibly. Before being included in the assessment, each document was reviewed

against the criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Kıral, 2020). In this way, information of uncertain origin, unverifiable content, or second-hand transmission was prevented from entering the analysis.

The scope of the study covers countries that have accumulated considerable experience in the sustainability of social security systems. Since a detailed examination of all countries was not feasible, purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling rests on the deliberate selection of the units that will yield the richest information for the research questions and is widely used in qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021; Baltacı, 2019). Accordingly, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Japan, and South Korea were included in the examination alongside Türkiye. Two criteria were decisive in the selection of countries. The first is that the countries chosen represent different welfare regimes; in this way, examples were drawn from conservative, social democratic, and hybrid models alike (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Castles et al., 2010). The second is that these countries possess rich experience of population ageing, pension reform, and active ageing policies (Harper, 2014; OECD, 2019). Observing these two criteria together secured maximum variation within the sample and reduced the risk of generalising from the experience of a single model. The comparative perspective made it possible to see not only the current situation of Türkiye but also which instruments countries facing similar problems have used and what outcomes they have achieved.

Content analysis and comparative analysis were used together in analysing the data. Content analysis is a systematic analytical technique that enables valid and replicable inferences to be drawn from texts (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, the documents examined were read, and the concepts of social security sustainability, state capacity, social welfare, institutional trust, domestic stability, and foreign policy effectiveness were designated as units of analysis; the relevant statements in the documents were coded under these concepts. In the second stage, the relationships among the codes were examined to reveal recurrent themes and relational patterns; the coding was reviewed at regular intervals to check whether identical statements had been gathered under the same concepts, and inconsistent codings were corrected. In the third stage, these themes were compared across countries, and similarities, differences, and common tendencies were identified. The comparison was not confined to economic indicators; demographic change, employment structure, social policy preferences, and indicators of institutional capacity were assessed together (Fukuyama, 2004; Besley & Persson, 2011). In this way, a large number of variables affecting the success of social security systems could be treated within the same framework. The principal aim of the analysis is to establish whether a meaningful and consistent relationship exists between the financial sustainability of social security systems and the strategic capacity of states.

Process tracing was employed to connect the findings obtained through content analysis within a causal logic. Process tracing is a method that permits examination of the intermediate mechanisms and the successive stages through which relationships among variables come about (George & Bennett, 2005). Along these lines, the chain of relationships extending from social security sustainability to geostrategic power was unravelled step by step. First, the effects of changes in the financial structure

of the social security system on public finances were assessed; the repercussions of these effects on state capacity were then examined. Subsequently, the consequences of changes in state capacity for social welfare and domestic stability were addressed; in the final stage, the effects of domestic stability on foreign policy effectiveness and on the capacity to generate geostrategic power were evaluated (Rose, 1998; Taliaferro et al., 2009). At each stage, it was checked whether the relationship established was supported by the theoretical and empirical findings in the literature. This approach allowed the logical consistency of the causal propositions advanced in the theoretical framework to be tested and enhanced the explanatory power of the research.

The conceptual model of the research is built upon the “Geostrategic Social Security Theory” developed within this study. This approach treats social security systems not merely as mechanisms of social assistance or retirement provision but as one of the fundamental components of state capacity. The view that the state’s ability to mobilise and transform societal resources shapes foreign policy behaviour has been elaborated in the international relations literature within both state theory and neoclassical realism (Evans, 1995; Taliaferro, 2006). Drawing on this body of work, the model positions social security sustainability as the independent variable; state capacity, social welfare, domestic stability, and foreign policy effectiveness as intervening variables; and the capacity to generate geostrategic power as the dependent variable. The model assumes that changes in the financial structure of the social security system affect the other variables mostly through indirect channels. For this reason, not only direct relationships but also chain effects among the variables were traced throughout the analysis. The construction of the model as a linear flow is a simplification; it is acknowledged that real-world relationships may be reciprocal and cyclical in character, and the model is intended to indicate the principal direction of these relationships.

To render the variables in the model concrete, indicators corresponding to each variable were specified. Social security sustainability was assessed through the ratio of active contributors to pensioners, the ratio of social security deficits to national income, budget transfers, the extent to which premium revenues cover expenditures, and actuarial balance (Holzmann & Hinz, 2005; OECD, 2023). State capacity was addressed through indicators of the effectiveness of public services, institutional performance, the quality of governance, and the sustainability of public finances (Besley & Persson, 2009; Kaufmann et al., 2010). In examining domestic stability, emphasis was placed on social trust, social cohesion, economic stability, and the level of trust in institutions (Rothstein, 2011). Foreign policy effectiveness, in turn, was evaluated within the framework of states’ capacity for international initiative, diplomatic effectiveness, room for strategic manoeuvre, and international influence (Zakaria, 1998; Nye, 2011). None of these indicators was treated in isolation; each was read in relation to the other variables. Particular attention was paid to tracing how the fiscal pressure accumulating in social security systems is transmitted to other domains through public finances, institutional functioning, and social trust. This approach established a strong link between the theoretical model and the analytical process and created a common ground for the interpretation of the findings.

One of the important stages of the research is the detailed examination of the Turkish case. In recent years Türkiye has been undergoing rapid change in terms of both demographic transformation and social security financing. Population ageing, rising life expectancy, and the deterioration of the balance between active contributors and pensioners affect the system directly, while problems such as increasing health expenditures and informal employment deepen this pressure (TÜİK, 2024; SGK, 2024). In this study the Turkish case is treated not merely as a national case but as a field of observation in which international trends can be viewed together. Developments in Türkiye were compared with practices in OECD countries, and an attempt was made to show through which instruments similar problems are managed in different countries (OECD, 2024). The aim is not simply to enumerate existing problems but also to assess under which conditions sustainable policy options could be implemented. In this respect, the Turkish case stands at the centre of both the practice-oriented and the policy-oriented dimensions of the article, and the findings obtained are intended to form the basis of the policy proposals to be developed in the sections that follow.

Forward-looking policy scenarios were also treated as part of the methodological assessment. The sustainability of social security systems was evaluated not only in the light of the present situation but also with regard to developments that may emerge over the long term. In this context, international experience concerning active ageing policies, gradual retirement schemes, and employment at advanced ages was examined (WHO, 2015; OECD, 2019). Practices concerning the reorganisation of working life in societies with rising life expectancy received particular attention; working models extending to age 70 for workers, 75 for civil servants, and up to 80 in certain professions requiring high levels of expertise were considered not as a compulsory policy choice but as long-term strategic scenarios that may be contemplated under specific conditions. This outlook is consistent with the international active ageing literature, which takes voluntariness and individual capacity as its basis (Walker, 2006; Foster & Walker, 2015). In constructing the scenarios, factors such as freedom of individual choice, health conditions, and the quality of working environments were also taken into account, and it was questioned whether the proposals would contribute not only to fiscal balance but also to social welfare. The normative dimension of the research took shape largely through these scenario assessments.

The validity and reliability of the research were strengthened by observing the criteria of credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability adopted in qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). To enhance credibility, data triangulation was employed: academic publications, official statistics, reports of international organisations, and legislative documents were read comparatively, and information appearing in different sources on the same subject was cross-verified. The use of different types of documents together is one of the principal means of reducing the bias that may arise from dependence on a single source in document-based research (Bowen, 2009). For transferability, the data sources, the country selection criteria, and the stages of analysis were described in detail, thereby giving the reader the opportunity to judge in which contexts the conclusions reached are valid. For consistency, the concepts were used in keeping with their established definitions in the literature; concepts such as state capacity, social security sustainability, and domestic stability were employed in

line with frameworks accepted in the international literature (Fukuyama, 2014; Rothstein, 2011). For confirmability, the documents and indicators on which the assessments rest were shown explicitly in the text, and personal judgement was kept distinct from document-based findings. Since in qualitative research the researcher is the principal research instrument, the possibility that the researcher's perspective might steer the analysis was not disregarded (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). To reduce this risk, findings that conflict with the central thesis of the study were not filtered out; on the contrary, they were deliberately incorporated into the analytical process, and it was adopted as a principle that these countervailing findings would be addressed openly in the discussion section.

In terms of research ethics, this study is an inquiry that rests entirely on publicly available written sources and does not require data collection from human participants. For this reason, the ethics committee approval required for research involving surveys, interviews, or experiments falls outside the scope of this study. Ethical responsibility, however, was not regarded as consisting solely of approval procedures. All sources drawn upon were cited, quotations were used without being detached from their context, and the data were not selectively pruned so as to force a particular conclusion. Findings that contradict one another were not concealed; differing views were given space within the text. Care was also taken to remain faithful to the wording of the sources when official statistics and institutional reports were conveyed. Since the preservation of scientific integrity is regarded as a precondition of reliability in document-based studies, these principles were observed at every stage of the research process.

The limitations of the research were also set out explicitly as part of the methodological design. First of all, the study does not rest on direct field research; survey, interview, or experimental data collection techniques were not used. The assessments were made on the basis of the existing literature, institutional reports, and official statistics. Although this choice is consistent with the purpose of the study, it entails certain constraints. It is not always possible to measure every dimension of variables such as state capacity, social trust, or foreign policy effectiveness through numerical indicators; this difficulty was mitigated by drawing on indicators accepted in the international literature (Kaufmann et al., 2010; OECD, 2023). Secondly, the countries examined are confined to particular examples; the conclusions reached should therefore not be regarded as equally valid for all countries. Indeed, the aim in qualitative research is not to generalise findings statistically to a population but to arrive at an analytic generalisation showing the extent to which the conceptual framework explaining the phenomenon under study holds in similar contexts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The selection of countries representing different welfare regimes softens the effect of this constraint without removing it altogether. Thirdly, the conceptual model is constructed as a linear flow of relationships; it is well known that real-world processes are far more complex and mutually interactive. The conclusions reached should therefore be interpreted not as definitive cause-and-effect relationships but as strong theoretical tendencies. Stating the limitations openly is both a requirement of academic transparency and a pointer to new areas of inquiry for future empirical studies.

In conclusion, the method introduced in this section offers a holistic analytical framework that examines the financial sustainability of social security systems in the context of state capacity and geostrategic power. The data gathered through document review were analysed by means of content analysis, comparative analysis, and process tracing, and the findings obtained were interpreted in line with the conceptual model constructed. In this way, the methodological infrastructure capable of answering the article's principal research questions was put in place. The next section presents in detail the findings reached through this method. The findings section will first address the main factors affecting the financial sustainability of social security systems; it will then assess the repercussions of these factors on state capacity, domestic stability, and foreign policy effectiveness; and in the final stage it will discuss together the theoretical and practical dimensions of the relationship extending from social security to geostrategic power.

5. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings obtained in line with the analytical framework set out in the methodology of the study. The findings are organised so as to follow the sequence of the causal chain in the theoretical model: the main sources of pressure affecting the fiscal sustainability of the SSI (Social Security Institution, SGK) are addressed first; the repercussions of these pressures on state capacity, social welfare, institutional trust and domestic stability are then assessed; and, finally, the empirical picture of the relationship extending from social security to foreign policy effectiveness and to the production of geostrategic power is set out. The first and most fundamental conclusion emerging from the analysis as a whole is this: the factors straining the fiscal sustainability of the SSI cannot be attributed to any single cause. National and international data have shown that the pressures on the system do not operate independently of one another; on the contrary, they form an intertwined, multi-layered structure in which each pressure amplifies the others. Population ageing, declining fertility, informal employment, a low ratio of active to passive insured persons, rising health expenditures and actuarial deficits are all at work simultaneously, and a deterioration in any one of them deepens the effects of the rest. Informality, for instance, erodes contribution revenues at the very moment when the advancing ageing process is enlarging the expenditure side; when the two pressures combine, the deficit grows faster than the sum of their individual effects. For this reason, although the findings are presented under separate headings, they should in fact be read as different faces of a single whole. The order followed throughout the section has been designed to make this unity visible.

The findings on the demographic front reveal the temporal dimension of the problem with full clarity. The population projections of the United Nations show that the share of older age groups in the total population is rising steadily across the world (United Nations, 2022). In OECD countries the number of pensioners per worker has been climbing for many years, a trend that makes the revenue-expenditure balance of pay-as-you-go pension systems progressively harder to maintain (OECD, 2023). How population ageing alters the flow of resources between generations, and how this shift feeds through to public finances, has been demonstrated in detail in comprehensive comparative studies of the generational economy (Lee & Mason, 2011). For Türkiye the picture is even more striking. Research on the country's demographic transition shows that the decline in fertility and the lengthening of life

expectancy have compressed into a much shorter span of time a process that Western European countries experienced over the course of a century (Koç et al., 2010). Official projections point in the same direction: the share of the elderly population is rising rapidly while the growth rate of the working-age population is slowing (TÜİK, 2024). The practical meaning of this difference in pace is the following: whereas European countries had the opportunity to transform their institutions gradually over several decades in order to adapt to ageing, the preparation time available to Türkiye is far shorter. Longer lives also mean longer periods spent in retirement; the balance between the years during which a person contributes to the system and the years during which he or she draws a pension is therefore steadily deteriorating. The literature likewise emphasises that the economic and social consequences of ageing are long-term and enduring in character (Harper, 2014). Similar demographic trends are observed in all the countries examined, yet the degree of institutional preparedness for these trends varies considerably from country to country: where preparations were made early the pressure remains manageable, whereas in countries that delayed, the deficits have turned into a permanent burden on the budget. This picture yields the first major finding confirming the study's first hypothesis: in every assessment of the future of the SSI, population projections must be treated as a central variable, and the fiscal structure of the system cannot be considered apart from the long-term outlook of state capacity.

At the same time, the analysis has shown that a fatalistic reading of ageing would also be misleading. A powerful approach has developed in the demographic literature holding that old age should be measured not only by the number of years elapsed since birth but also by remaining life expectancy, health status and functional capacity (Sanderson & Scherbov, 2007). Measurements carried out from this perspective reveal that as life expectancy lengthens, the meaning of advanced ages changes as well: today's sixty-five is not the same as the sixty-five of earlier generations (Sanderson & Scherbov, 2010). It has also been shown in the literature that a number of widespread assumptions about ageing do not accord with the scientific evidence, and that the view of the elderly population as nothing more than a burden on the economy rests on no solid foundation (Börsch-Supan, 2013). The data evaluated within the scope of this research support this corrective perspective: in countries where healthy life expectancy is lengthening, the participation of older age groups both in working life and in social life is increasing, and this participation is becoming a factor that eases the pressure on the system. Empirical studies have likewise demonstrated that improvements in population health make measurable contributions to economic growth (Bloom, Kuhn, & Prettnner, 2018). The demographic transition should therefore be read not through a one-sided narrative of threat but as a process of transformation containing both risks and opportunities. This finding empirically validates the point of departure of the Strategic Active Ageing approach developed in the theoretical framework of the study: the problem is not ageing itself, but the capacity of institutions to adapt to this transformation.

The second major group of variables indicated by the findings consists of problems originating in the labour market. In a contribution-based system, the fundamental source of revenue is the number of people who work and for whom contributions are paid; every development that shrinks this number constricts the arteries of the system. International data have established that in economies where

informal employment is widespread, the revenue base of social security systems weakens (ILO, 2024). That informality is a structural problem eroding social insurance revenues in Türkiye has long been voiced in the national literature as well (Alper, 2021). The periods examined within the scope of this research confirm the same relationship: in periods when informality rose, contribution revenues fell short of expectations, and this not only reduced the money in the till but also undermined the accuracy of actuarial calculations. For the person working informally makes no contribution to the system today, yet will arrive at the system's door tomorrow with demands for health services and old-age security; informality, in other words, strikes the system's revenues in the present and its expenditures in the future. Although a certain decline in informality rates has been recorded in Türkiye in recent years, the problem has evidently not disappeared. Youth unemployment and late entry into work constitute a separate channel of pressure: a person who enters working life late has a shorter contribution record, and in the long run this shortfall affects both the individual's pension entitlement and the balance of the system. Comparative data show clearly that the social security systems of countries with high employment rates are more resilient to shocks (OECD, 2024). The conclusion that follows is unambiguous: a sustainable social security system cannot be built without a sustainable labour market. Every step that raises employment, reduces informality and increases productivity is, at the same time, a social security reform.

The structure of contributions itself also stands out among the findings as a separate heading. The effect of contribution rates on labour costs and employment decisions is a debated question in the literature; it has been shown that in systems where the link between contributions and future benefits is severed, contributions may come to be perceived as a kind of employment tax, and that this can weaken work incentives (Disney, 2004). Conversely, it has been demonstrated that reforms strengthening the link between contribution and benefit can improve both the perceived fairness of the system and its fiscal balance (Lindbeck & Persson, 2003). The cases examined within the scope of this research are consistent with these assessments: in systems where the relationship between the contribution paid and the pension awarded is transparent and predictable, contribution compliance strengthens and the inclination to slip into informality weakens. This finding carries a practical meaning for Türkiye: solutions based on raising contribution rates, unless accompanied by arrangements that strengthen the contribution-benefit link, may defeat their own purpose by feeding informality. Comparative findings on the size of the welfare state in ageing societies point in a similar direction: the sustainability of systems depends less on the level of expenditure than on whether revenue and expenditure items are designed coherently with one another (Disney, 2007). Contribution policy is therefore not a technical detail but a strategic field of design that determines both the fiscal balance of the system and the balance of its social legitimacy.

Another factor straining the fiscal structure is the burden carried into the present by early retirement arrangements implemented in the past. Multi-country comparative research programmes have documented in detail that the early-exit options offered by social security systems in effect steer workers into early retirement, and that this permanently enlarges the costs of the system (Gruber & Wise, 1999). In the continuation of the same line of research, the gains delivered to public finances by

reforms that discourage early retirement and extend working life have also been demonstrated (Gruber & Wise, 2007). Türkiye's past practices are no exception to this general pattern. In periods when the retirement age was kept low, the number of pensioners per active insured person rose and the gap between revenues and expenditures widened; the legal and social dimensions of the debates on postponing retirement in Türkiye have also been examined in the national literature (Tuncay, 2012). By contrast, most of the developed countries examined are moving towards raising the retirement age gradually, and even indexing it to gains in life expectancy (OECD, 2023). How keeping the retirement age fixed in a society with lengthening lifespans erodes the actuarial balance over time can be traced concretely in the cases considered. Studies examining the long-term trajectory of the actuarial balance in Türkiye likewise indicate that sustainability will be strained under current parameters (Yaşarlar, 2016). At the same time, the data also show that the capacity to work at advanced ages is not the same across all occupations. It is therefore evident that, rather than a uniform increase in the retirement age, a graduated and differentiated retirement approach that takes account of the nature of the occupation, health status and personal preference constitutes, under certain conditions, the more judicious policy option.

The question of working at advanced ages becomes still clearer upon closer examination of the data. The literature has established that the relationship between age and individual productivity is not linear, and that it varies greatly according to sector and the nature of the work (Skirbekk, 2004). In physically demanding jobs a certain decline in working capacity is observed as age advances, whereas in knowledge- and experience-intensive fields the picture is different: accumulated knowledge, judgement and institutional memory continue to generate economic value at advanced ages (Skirbekk, 2008). Firm-level research on the productivity of mixed-age work teams likewise shows that the contribution of experienced workers is measurable (Göbel & Zwick, 2012). In fields such as academia, law, diplomacy, management and consultancy this contribution is especially pronounced. Within this framework, the long-term scenarios considered in the study showed that differentiated models — preserving current age limits for those in arduous and physically wearing occupations while granting voluntary working options extending to seventy for manual workers, seventy-five for civil servants, and up to eighty in certain professions requiring high levels of expertise — constitute policy alternatives worthy of debate. The point that must be underlined here, however, is the following: such models acquire meaning only where the conditions for healthy ageing are secured, voluntariness is taken as the governing principle, the working environment is adapted to age, and freedom of personal choice is protected. Raising the age limit alone, without improving working conditions, fails to produce the expected benefit and magnifies social opposition. The preservation of experience capital and the easing of the fiscal pressure on the system can meet within a single policy design; this is one of the most original conclusions indicated by the findings.

The international body of knowledge on active ageing policies reinforces this assessment. Active ageing has been defined as a holistic policy framework envisaging support for ageing individuals along the dimensions of health, participation and security (WHO, 2002), and it was built not merely on the goal of extending working life but on that of spending old age in full participation in the whole of

social life (Walker, 2002). That working life must be redesigned in accordance with this new reality in societies that live longer and in better health is also argued in the OECD's comprehensive reports on the subject (OECD, 2006). The country experiences examined within the scope of this research show that this framework finds its counterpart in practice: in countries that support the continued presence of older age groups in the labour market, the fiscal pressure on the system eases while, at the same time, the income levels and life satisfaction of older individuals rise. The applications of active and successful ageing approaches in European policy practice yield similar results (Foster & Walker, 2015). In systems where partial retirement, flexible working and consultancy-based employment models are applied, the accumulated knowledge of experienced workers remains within the economy, institutional memory is preserved and the transfer of knowledge between generations is strengthened. Taken together, these findings show clearly that the conception of old age as nothing but a period of dependency does not reflect present-day conditions, and that the Strategic Active Ageing approach is consonant with international practice.

Health expenditures constitute another centre of gravity shaping the fiscal outlook of the system. It is well established that an ageing population structure increases the demand for health services and that the spread of chronic diseases raises the costs of long-term care (WHO, 2015). The data examined confirm that health expenditures have become one of the fastest-growing items in the social security budgets of many countries. In the case of Türkiye, the comprehensiveness of universal health insurance is an important social achievement; extending health coverage to virtually the entire population is a valuable transformation from the standpoint both of protection against poverty and of social equality. Yet the widening of coverage has, by its very nature, brought new fiscal burdens with it. The point that stands out here is that the growth of expenditure need not be accepted fatalistically. International organisation reports have established that investments in preventive health services and healthy-ageing policies can lower treatment costs over the long run (WHO, 2021). Early diagnosis, preventive medicine and digital health applications rank among the most effective instruments of cost control in the country cases examined. In countries where coordination between the health system and the pension system is strong, the total social security burden is managed more effectively; for the individual who ages in good health both reduces health expenditure and is able to remain longer in working life. This circular relationship between the two fields makes health policy a precondition of the active ageing strategy. To read the fiscal sustainability of the SSI solely through the window of pensions is therefore an incomplete reading; the effective management of health expenditures is an inseparable component of sustainability.

Institutional governance capacity also occupies a more decisive place among the findings than might have been expected. That factors such as contribution collection rates, inspection capacity, data management and the efficient use of resources bear directly on the fiscal performance of social security institutions is clearly visible in assessments of international social security practice (ISSA, 2022). Countries with strong institutional structures remain more resilient even when confronted with the same demographic pressure. The cases examined show that revenue-raising measures are not sufficient on their own, and that how the available resources are managed matters at least as much as the revenue

itself. The literature has demonstrated that the quality of governance is a measurable variable in cross-country comparisons and that it is closely associated with institutional performance (Kaufmann et al., 2010). The theoretical view that state capacity is a matter not only of the quantity of resources but also of the working ability of institutions (Fukuyama, 2004) finds its counterpart in this picture. Growing institutional transparency nourishes the trust that citizens place in the system, and this trust finds expression across a wide field, from contribution compliance to support for reforms. The conclusion that follows is clear: the fiscal sustainability of the SSI is at the same time a matter of institutional transformation; every investment that strengthens the institution's capacity for collection, inspection and service delivery is, indirectly, an investment in the fiscal balance of the system.

Digitalisation, the most dynamic dimension of institutional capacity, stands out in the findings as a heading in its own right. In countries where applications such as electronic contribution tracking, data analytics and inter-institutional data sharing have become widespread, informality is detected more easily and collection rates rise. International assessments of the ways social security institutions make use of information technologies likewise establish that digital infrastructure has become the load-bearing element of institutional effectiveness (ISSA, 2022). In the cases examined, the effect of digital transformation is not confined to the cost side: easier access to services raises citizen satisfaction, the traceability of transactions curbs arbitrariness, and analytical tools operating on large datasets make it possible to produce more accurate long-term actuarial projections. The improvement in projection quality allows policymakers to see the road ahead and contributes to reform decisions being taken on firmer ground. The distance covered in Türkiye in moving social security services onto electronic platforms is a valuable accumulation in this respect; the findings show, however, that digitalisation is not a one-off project but a process requiring continuous investment and institutional learning. Given that investment in technological infrastructure nourishes institutional capacity, and institutional capacity in turn nourishes state capacity, digital transformation should be regarded as one of the permanent headings of the social security reform agenda.

Turning to the relationship at the centre of the research, a strong and two-way bond is observed between the fiscal condition of the social security system and state capacity. The reciprocal relationship among the power to tax, institutional effectiveness and the ability to deliver public services is one of the foundational findings of the state capacity literature (Besley & Persson, 2011). In the countries examined, the general performance indicators of public administration also followed a more favourable course in periods when the social security balance was comparatively sound. In periods when deficits grew, by contrast, the pressure on the budget increased, and the resources that could be allocated to other fields — from education to infrastructure, from health to security — contracted. The social security deficit, in other words, is not a figure confined to the SSI's balance sheet; it is a magnitude whose shadow falls across all of the state's expenditure priorities. Actuarial modelling studies of the pension system in Türkiye likewise reveal the risk that the long-term trajectory of budget transfers poses for public finances (Erdem, 2022). Recent studies have shown that the link between pension sustainability and the effectiveness of government under conditions of population ageing can also be established empirically (Cho & Lee, 2025). The relationship, moreover, does not run in one direction

only: a fiscally strong social security system endows public administration with predictability, predictability strengthens the investment climate, and a growing economy replenishes the system by enlarging contribution revenues. The theoretical framework concerning the constitutive role of fiscal institutions in the formation of state capacity (Besley & Persson, 2009), together with the empirical findings establishing the relationship between state capacity and long-run economic performance (Dincecco & Katz, 2016), provides fertile ground for explaining this circular structure. The central thesis that social security sustainability must be treated as a strategic variable of state capacity thus finds strong confirmation in the findings.

When the concrete operation of this bond is traced through the budget, the picture becomes sharper still. Covering social security deficits with transfers from the central budget creates a permanent burden that narrows the room for manoeuvre of public finances. In the periods examined, it was observed that in years when this burden grew, pressure built up on the share of future-oriented expenditure fields such as education, research and development, infrastructure and defence. The mechanism at work here is simple, but its consequences are heavy: because the transfers are compulsory and cannot be deferred, when the budget tightens the cuts fall on future-oriented investments, so that today's deficit is financed out of tomorrow's capacity. The loss of flexibility in public finances constrains the state's ability to plan for the long term; countries with balanced systems, by contrast, enter economic crises better prepared. The preservation of budgetary discipline supports investor confidence, a climate of confidence supports growth, and growth in turn replenishes the contribution base. When this cycle operates in the positive direction, a self-reinforcing structure emerges; when it operates in the negative direction, the spiral of deficit, debt and pressure deepens. The fiscal structure of the SSI thus ceases to be an internal accounting matter and becomes a variable affecting the country's overall economic capacity and its strategic spending power. This finding coincides directly with one of the central theses of the study.

The findings on the relationship between social security and economic growth display the same two-way structure. Economic growth widens the revenue base of the system by increasing employment and contribution revenues; a functioning social security system, in turn, opens channels that nourish growth. Studies examining the relationship between changes in population structure and economic growth establish the positive effect of a healthy and secure population on productivity (Bloom, Canning, & Fink, 2010). That the goals of protecting the old and promoting growth can be pursued together in securing old-age incomes has also been argued in the pioneering international reports on the subject (World Bank, 1994). In the cases examined, the consumption and saving behaviour of households follows a more stable course in societies where income security is assured, and the reduction of uncertainty about the future facilitates long-term decisions. A secure working environment also supports entrepreneurship and investment in human capital; for the existence of a safety net to fall back on in the event of failure makes risk-taking a rational option. Within this framework, viewing social security expenditures merely as a cost item is an incomplete approach; these expenditures possess, at the same time, the character of an institutional investment supporting economic activity. This relationship of mutual nourishment between growth and sustainability

demonstrates once again that social security reforms cannot be considered apart from development strategies.

The conclusions reached on the dimension of economic resilience complete this picture. The functioning of income-protection mechanisms in times of crisis serves as a safety valve preventing the total collapse of domestic demand; the literature on inequality and crisis likewise draws attention to this stabilising role of social expenditure (Stiglitz, 2012). That the capacity of individuals and households to manage the risks they may encounter over the course of their lives also produces consequences at the societal level has been grounded theoretically in the social risk management approach (Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2001). The literature has also shown that the difference between economic vulnerability and resilience is measurable, and that the responses of countries to shocks are determined to a large extent by their institutional endowments (Briguglio et al., 2009). In the countries examined, regular transfers such as unemployment benefits and retirement pensions prevented spending from falling below a certain level during periods of contraction; in this respect the system behaved like an automatically operating stabilisation mechanism. That demand does not collapse entirely protects not only households but also firms, and hence employment. Given that states with strong economic resilience command a wider field of action in the face of external shocks, this finding also lends indirect support to the assumptions concerning the connection between state capacity and foreign policy.

The data on the relationship between the social security system and social welfare likewise support the theoretical model. The welfare state literature defines social security as the fundamental institutional guarantee protecting individuals against the risks of old age, illness and unemployment (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Barr, 2020). In the countries examined, in societies where pension, health and social assistance mechanisms function effectively, people's anxiety about the future diminishes, and this relief is reflected all the way through to consumption and investment behaviour. In periods when social protection networks are strong, indicators of social satisfaction run at higher levels (OECD, 2023). The approach that regards the expansion of freedoms and capabilities as the true purpose of development likewise counts social guarantees among the preconditions of people's command over their own lives (Sen, 1999). Viewed from this perspective, the social security system is not merely a mechanism that transfers income; it is an infrastructure of freedom that makes it possible for people to plan their futures. That this infrastructure softens social tensions in times of economic crisis, and nourishes the sentiment of solidarity in ordinary times, can be traced clearly in the cases examined. Rising welfare nourishes trust, trust nourishes stability, and stability nourishes state capacity; one more link in the chain of the theoretical model is thereby confirmed.

The preservation of welfare levels is a separate and critical heading indicated by the findings. The literature emphasises that the success of pension reforms must be measured not only by fiscal savings but together with the level of protection provided (Barr & Diamond, 2008). Comparative assessments of the reform experience of OECD countries likewise show that arrangements which improve the fiscal balance can, where the adequacy of pensions is neglected, give rise to a new risk of old-age poverty

(Whiteford & Whitehouse, 2006). In the cases examined, social satisfaction and attachment to the system are higher in systems where retirement income remains in a reasonable relationship to earnings during working life; when a person who has contributed to the system for years suffers a serious loss of income in retirement, the trust placed in the institution is eroded. The classic finding that encompassing social security institutions are more successful than targeted models in reducing poverty and inequality (Korpi & Palme, 1998) finds its counterpart in the cases examined: social cohesion is stronger in societies where old-age poverty is low. The conclusion that follows is that fiscal sustainability and the preservation of welfare levels are not goals to be sacrificed to one another, but two mutually complementary pillars. Reforms pursued solely with the aim of savings and lacking social acceptance may achieve balance on paper, yet in practice they encounter resistance and loss of trust, and fail to produce lasting results in the long run.

The conclusions reached on the dimension of social trust and social capital point in the same direction. The literature has established that universal and fairly functioning welfare institutions can nourish both trust in institutions and the trust people place in one another (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). It has also been demonstrated empirically that the quality of contact with welfare-state institutions directly affects citizens' general level of trust: citizens who are treated fairly and with respect place greater trust both in institutions and in society (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005). Social security services are among the fields in which the citizen comes into the most frequent and most direct contact with the state; the predictable and fair operation of these services becomes one of the carriers of general trust in the state. The bond between the trustworthiness of institutions and the voluntary compliance of citizens has long been recognised in the trust literature (Levi, 1998). In the cases examined, in countries where trust in social security institutions is high, general trust in public institutions is also high, whereas in settings where trust has weakened, erosion is observed across many fields, from tax compliance to support for reform. The findings that just institutions strengthen social solidarity over the long run (Rothstein, 1998) and that social capital enhances the problem-solving power of societies (Putnam, 2000) support these observations theoretically as well. In sum, the social security system is a trust-producing institution, and the trust it produces constitutes the societal pillar of state capacity.

The dimension of legitimacy — the political counterpart of trust — carries particular weight for reform processes. That the legitimacy of modern states has come to depend to a significant degree on the economic and social guarantees they provide to their citizens, and that the welfare state in this sense serves as a source of legitimation, has long been debated at the theoretical level (Habermas, 1975). The cases examined give this debate concrete content: in periods when uncertainty about the future of the social security system grows, the trust citizens place not only in the institution but in public authority in general is shaken; conversely, in periods when the system operates steadily, the relationship between state and society is consolidated. For reform processes the consequences of this difference are tangible: in systems where trust and legitimacy are high, far-reaching changes can be implemented with relative ease, whereas in low-trust settings even the most technical adjustments meet with serious resistance. This finding explains why, in the design of reform, communication, gradual transition and the protection of acquired rights are not technical details but preconditions of success.

The social security system is one of the most concrete clauses of the contract between state and society; preserving the trust placed in this contract is also the guarantee of the feasibility of long-term reforms.

The findings on the management of income inequalities likewise attach themselves to this framework. The literature has shown that extreme deterioration in the distribution of income produces adverse consequences across a wide field, from public health to crime rates, and magnifies the risk of social instability (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Assessments indicating that political polarisation and institutional distrust increase in societies where inequality deepens point in the same direction (Stiglitz, 2012). In the countries examined, pension payments, health services and social assistance were seen to perform a powerful protective function for low-income groups in particular, and social security mechanisms were found to contribute to social integration by balancing income inequalities to a certain degree. Societies with a comparatively even distribution of income occupy a more advantageous position in terms of social cohesion. This picture shows that keeping inequality under control is not solely a matter of social justice: a balanced social structure consolidates the relationship between state and society, a sound relationship nourishes domestic stability, and domestic stability sustains the continuity of state capacity. The management of inequality thus emerges as one of the invisible yet functional links in the chain extending from social security to geostrategic capacity.

The conclusions reached on the dimension of domestic stability establish that the stabilising power of social security systems becomes visible above all in periods of uncertainty. The human security approach has long maintained that economic and social guarantees are among the constitutive elements of human security, and that insecurity produces consequences that are not merely individual but social and political (UNDP, 1994; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). In the cases examined, levels of social conflict remained comparatively low in societies where the risks of unemployment, illness and old age were secured, and income security and access to basic services strengthened people's attachment to the system. The individual who is secure claims ownership of the present to the degree that he or she does not fear the future; accumulating at the societal level, this ownership forms the everyday ground of stability. In settings where insecurity spreads, by contrast, economic anxieties can rapidly turn into social tension, and tension can generate a spiral that draws the political sphere in as well. These observations show that the relationship between social security sustainability and domestic stability is not a weak and indirect one; it is, on the contrary, one of the load-bearing columns of national resilience. The study's third hypothesis thereby acquires strong empirical support.

The dimension of social resilience and crisis management is the field in which this relationship has been tested most strikingly. Disaster and crisis research has established that social bonds and institutional supports are decisive in the capacity of societies to withstand crises (Aldrich, 2012). The same literature has shown that social capital is one of the fundamental components of resilience at the community level (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). The pandemic period served, in this respect, as something of a natural test: countries with strong social protection mechanisms came through this extraordinary period at lower social cost, and thanks to income supports and health coverage it proved possible to prevent both the collapse of households and the shaking of trust in public authority. In countries where

protection networks remained weak, by contrast, economic anxieties rapidly turned into social tension and the legitimacy of the state suffered greater injury. The cases examined showed that in extraordinary periods social security systems are not merely a channel of expenditure but the state's widest and swiftest hand reaching out to society: thanks to existing records, payment infrastructure and the institutional network, support could be delivered to millions of households within a short time. This capacity cannot be built from scratch at the moment of crisis; it can only be erected upon a strong system that functions in ordinary times. Investment in the social security system is therefore, at the same time, an investment in the country's crisis management capacity.

A similar relationship was observed on the dimension of international economic attractiveness. Institutional economics has established that institutions and institutional stability are among the fundamental determinants of economic performance, and that investment decisions depend not only on price indicators but on rules and predictability (North, 1990). The comparative historical findings that inclusive institutions are the source of long-run prosperity while extractive institutions are the source of decline support the same framework (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In the countries examined, in periods when the social security system did not generate fiscal crises, perceptions of risk attaching to public finances remained low and inflows of international investment followed a more favourable course. What enters the investor's calculation is not only tax rates and labour costs but also social peace and institutional stability; societies where the risk of social conflict is low are regarded as safer harbours for long-term investment. Social security sustainability thus produces an indirect yet lasting effect on economic competitiveness; rising competitiveness nourishes state capacity, and strengthened capacity nourishes policy production in the international arena. The causal chain extending from social security to economic performance, and from there to geostrategic capacity, becomes visible once again through this channel.

The findings on comparative reform experience show that success gathers around certain common principles. Studies of the political conditions of pension reform in Western Europe establish that institutional structures and mechanisms of social consensus determine the fate of reforms (Bonoli, 2000). In countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Japan, pension systems have been re-linked to gains in life expectancy, and arrangements supporting the continued presence of older age groups in the labour market have come to the fore (OECD, 2019). Comprehensive inventory studies comparing the retirement-income systems of different countries likewise show that there is no single recipe for success: each country develops combinations suited to its own demographic, economic and institutional conditions (Whitehouse, 2007). The common denominator of these reforms is that their aim is not merely to cut expenditure; the real objective is to establish a new balance between working life and retirement appropriate to demographic reality. In the cases examined, reforms that won social acceptance allowed gradual transition periods, protected acquired rights and explained the rationale for reform to the public with candour. Arrangements bearing the character of imposition, by contrast, even where they entered into force in the short term, faced the risk of being reversed at the first political opportunity. This finding establishes that the success of reform depends as much on the management of the political and social process as on technical design.

Viewed from the standpoint of financing architecture, multi-pillar pension models are seen to raise the resilience of systems markedly. In structures where public pensions, occupational pension programmes and individual savings mechanisms are used together, risks are not piled onto a single source, and demographic and economic shocks are shared among the different pillars (Holzmann & Hinz, 2005). How the public-private pension mix has diversified across OECD countries, and the flexibility this diversity has lent to systems, has been set out in comparative studies (Queisser et al., 2007). The performance in international experience of models resting on defined-contribution principles and adjusting of their own accord to demographic change reinforces this assessment (Holzmann et al., 2012). In the cases examined, countries where pension funds are managed effectively and transparently have been able to build sounder fiscal structures and to ease the pressure on the budget. Systems resting on a single source, by contrast, have remained more fragile in the face of shocks. For Türkiye, the meaning of this finding is that individual pension and supplementary pension mechanisms should be designed not as alternatives to the public system but as complements that share its burden and enhance its resilience. Given the strong relationship between fund management capacity and institutional capacity, financing diversity and fund governance are two headings on the policy agenda concerning the future of the SSI that cannot be disregarded.

Women's participation in the labour force is another strategic variable indicated by the findings. International data have established that rising female employment widens the revenue base of social security systems (ILO, 2021). The national literature has shown that the welfare regime in Türkiye has historically rested on intra-family solidarity and on women's unpaid care labour, and that this structure has constrained both female employment and the coverage of social security (Buğra & Keyder, 2006). This diagnosis establishes that the increase in female employment is, for Türkiye, not merely a question of revenue but a question of widening the inclusiveness of social security: the woman who remains outside working life cannot accumulate pension and health entitlements in her own name, and is compelled to construct her security through a husband or father. At the same time, the analysis shows that the matter cannot be treated solely as a question of labour supply: given the decisive effect of early childhood on individual development and long-term health (Marmot, 2004), family policies and employment policies must be designed together. In the country cases examined, flexible models such as remote working, part-time working and home-based working proved functional in reconciling women's economic participation with care responsibilities within the family when combined with high-quality childcare services. There is no necessary opposition between female employment and family integrity; with appropriate policy design the two goals can be supported together. Given the bond between the quality of human capital and the long-term sustainability of the social security system, it is evident that family policies cannot be kept outside the social security reform agenda.

The conclusions reached on the dimension of foreign policy effectiveness constitute the most original cluster of findings of the research. The international relations literature has established that a strong state apparatus is necessary for national wealth to be converted into influence in foreign policy, and that states unable to mobilise their internal resources cannot be effective in the international arena (Zakaria, 1998; Rose, 1998). The decisive role played by internal economic balances and the allocation

of resources in the rise and decline of great powers has likewise been demonstrated through historical analysis (Kennedy, 1987). Contemporary approaches to the measurement of national power argue that power must be assessed not by military inventories alone but together with the state's capacity to convert societal resources (Tellis et al., 2000). The cases examined present a picture consistent with this theoretical framework: in periods when budgetary pressure eased and public finances strengthened, states were able to allocate more resources to defence, diplomacy, technology and international development; states experiencing fiscal fragility, by contrast, were compelled to expend their energies largely on the management of internal problems. The assessment that power is produced not from military instruments alone but from the totality of economic and societal resources (Nye, 2011) accords with these observations. This picture shows that the fiscal sustainability of the social security system is bound, indirectly yet powerfully, to the capacity to produce national power.

When the operating mechanism of this relationship is examined more closely, two distinct channels can be distinguished. The first is the resource channel: every resource that social security deficits absorb from the budget is a resource withdrawn from fields of strategic investment; balanced systems, by contrast, endow the state with a fiscal flexibility in which it can set its priorities for itself. The second is the channel of legitimacy and stability: states with strong internal legitimacy can respond to international crises with greater resolve, and domestic stability affords foreign policy decision-makers a wider field of manoeuvre and a higher capacity for risk-taking. The neoclassical realist framework, according to which the foreign policy behaviour of states is shaped not only by the pressures of the international system but by domestic political and institutional filters (Ripsman et al., 2016), supplies the theoretical foundation of this second channel; the same literature has shown that the capacity for internal resource mobilisation determines the strategic behaviour of states (Taliaferro, 2006). In the cases examined the two channels are seen to operate together: states that preserve their fiscal balance and sustain their social support are able to pursue their foreign policy objectives both over a longer horizon and with greater consistency. The effect in question becomes still more pronounced in middle-sized and large states whose resources and objectives are extensive; for the geostrategic ambitions of such states show less tolerance for the carrying of internal fragilities. For countries such as Türkiye, whose regional sphere of influence is wide, this finding means that social security reforms are at the same time a matter of foreign policy capacity.

The dimension of national security does not fall outside this framework either. The human security literature maintains that security is not confined to military threats, and that economic and social guarantees are likewise among the constitutive elements of national security (UNDP, 1994; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). In the cases examined, the risk of unrest was seen to rise in societies where income security weakened, unemployment climbed and protection mechanisms proved insufficient; in periods when economic fragilities deepened, political polarisation and social tension mounted. Countries with strong social security systems, by contrast, came through periods of crisis at lower social cost. The easing of society's anxieties about the future consolidates the legitimacy of the state; strengthened legitimacy drives down the costs of internal security and releases the outward-facing capacity of the security apparatus. These findings establish that the bond between social security

and national security is not an abstract theoretical proposition but a concrete relationship producing measurable consequences, and they confirm the study's assumptions grounded in the human security approach.

When the relation of the findings to the theoretical model developed here is assessed in its own right, the explanatory capacity of the Geostrategic Social Security Theory is seen to be high. The traditional social security literature concentrates predominantly on questions of welfare, income distribution and social protection, while the traditional power literature for the most part leaves social security institutions outside its analysis. Yet all of the channels traced throughout the analysis have shown that these two fields cannot be treated in isolation from one another. The level of fiscal sustainability affects state capacity; state capacity shapes economic performance and institutional trust; economic performance and institutional trust nourish domestic stability; and domestic stability constitutes the ground required for foreign policy effectiveness. The theoretical corpus on the decisive role of the state's transformative capacity in economic and social outcomes (Evans, 1995), together with the analyses of the institutional foundations of political order (Fukuyama, 2014), supplies serviceable instruments for explaining the operation of the intermediate links of the chain. In the international cases examined, the trace of the social security system could be followed at every link of the chain; countries with fiscally strong systems emerged from crises more resilient not only economically but politically and strategically as well. The conceptual bridge that the theory builds between the disciplines of social policy and international relations is supported by the findings and offers testable propositions for future empirical examination. This strengthens the original theoretical contribution of the study.

When the findings are assessed in their entirety, the conclusion reached is that the fiscal sustainability of social security systems is a multi-layered phenomenon possessing economic, social, political and geostrategic dimensions. The causal chain traced throughout the analysis displayed a consistent aspect at every stage: fiscally sustainable systems support social welfare; rising welfare nourishes institutional trust, and trust nourishes domestic stability. Domestic stability prepares the ground for the development of state capacity; strengthened capacity raises economic resilience; and resilience and institutional trust, in turn, open a wider field of action to foreign policy decision-makers. The trace of the social security system can be followed at every link of the chain; it is the point of origin. To treat the fiscal sustainability of the SSI solely within the debates of social policy is therefore insufficient; the question must at the same time be read from the perspective of state capacity and national strategy. The conclusions reached support the fundamental propositions of the Geostrategic Social Security Theory developed in this research. Social security systems are not merely the welfare institutions of the past; they are the instruments of the strategic state capacity of the future, and their sustainability is one of the fundamental institutional variables affecting states' long-term domestic stability, their foreign policy effectiveness and their geostrategic position. This integrative conclusion constitutes the empirical foundation of the assessments to be taken up, in comparison with the literature, in the discussion section that follows.

6. DISCUSSION

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that the financial sustainability of social security systems can no longer be treated adequately as a narrowly defined budgetary matter. The evidence presented in the findings section shows that the deterioration in the SSI's revenue-expenditure balance has permanently enlarged the transfers made from the central budget, and that these transfers have narrowed the resources the state can devote to other areas. This picture is consistent with the welfare state literature, which regards social security institutions as one of the fundamental institutional pillars of the modern state (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Barr, 2020). Yet the real issue here lies not in the size of the deficit but in its nature. Unlike defence or investment spending, pension and health expenditures are obligations that are politically and legally extremely difficult to cut in the short run. Carrying the character of vested rights, these payments expand the inflexible portion of the budget and narrow governments' room for manoeuvre in the face of unexpected developments. The state capacity literature has long emphasised that the ability of public institutions to perform their functions depends to a large extent on the continuity and predictability of resources (Fukuyama, 2004; Besley & Persson, 2011). Viewed from this angle, social security deficits can be read as a structural pressure that quietly consumes the state's fiscal space. The relationship indicated by the findings gives concrete form to the first link of the Geostrategic Social Security Theory developed in the theoretical framework, namely the connection between financial sustainability and state capacity. It follows that treating social security reforms merely as technical interventions aimed at closing deficits is an incomplete reading; such reforms are at the same time interventions that restore the state's long-term capacity to govern.

The second important result revealed by the findings concerns the effects of social security on social peace and domestic stability. The view that social protection mechanisms strengthen social cohesion has deep roots in the literature (Korpi & Palme, 1998; Rothstein, 1998). The picture reached in this study points in a similar direction. In periods when the purchasing power of pensions declines, access to health services becomes harder, or uncertainty about the future of the system grows, citizens' trust both in the institution itself and in public authority more broadly is seen to erode. Loss of trust is not merely an abstract sentiment; it affects a wide range of concrete behaviours, from the willingness to pay contributions and the tendency to shift into informality to saving behaviour and political satisfaction. It is well established that citizens' voluntary compliance with the state is nourished by the belief that the state operates fairly and reliably (Levi, 1998; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Social security institutions constitute the widest surface of contact on which this belief is tested, since almost every citizen deals with them at some point in life. The conclusion that emerges is this: the relationship between the SSI's financial health and domestic stability is not direct, but an indirect yet powerful relationship operating through trust and legitimacy. The theses of the human security approach, which treat economic security as a precondition of social peace, support this reading (UNDP, 1994; Commission on Human Security, 2003). Social security is the first link in a chain that sustains society insofar as it protects individuals, and sustains the state insofar as it protects society.

At this point, an honest discussion requires openly addressing the strongest objection that can be raised against the causal chain constructed in this study: the relationship may also run in the opposite

direction. That is, just as sustainable social security systems may produce strong states, strong states may also build sustainable social security systems. It is clear that states with high tax-collecting power, competent bureaucracies and consolidated political institutions are more likely to carry out reforms that preserve actuarial balance (Skocpol, 1985; Mann, 1984). This objection is legitimate and cannot be ignored. Two points, however, must be underlined. First, the existence of a mutually reinforcing relationship between the two variables does not eliminate the effect running from social security to state capacity; rather, it points to a circular structure. A financially healthy system strengthens the state's hand, the strengthened state manages the system better, and the cycle turns in a positive direction. Conversely, a system with growing deficits absorbs the state's resources, the weakened state becomes unable to reform, and the cycle this time spirals downwards. Second, historical examples show that the relationship is not one-way. Some countries with relatively limited institutional capacity have managed to put their systems on track through determined reforms, while some countries with strong institutional capacity have enlarged their deficits through political choices. It is therefore more consistent both with the findings and with the emphasis of institutional economics on circular causation to read this relationship not as a mechanical one-way causality but as a spiral that feeds on itself, for better or for worse (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

With the same honesty, the position of the findings vis-à-vis rival explanations should also be assessed. The first rival explanation is the purely fiscal view: on this view, social security deficits are no different from any other public deficit, and the matter is reduced to the cost of borrowing. The findings show, however, that social security deficits differ from ordinary budget deficits in two respects. They are structural, destined by demographic causes to persist for decades, and they are tied to obligations whose interruption directly shakes social peace. The second rival explanation comes from the structuralist wing of international relations: the foreign policy performance of states is determined essentially by the distribution of power in the international system, and the role of domestic institutions is secondary (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). The findings of this study do not deny the importance of structural factors, but they demonstrate that explaining why states under the same structural conditions perform differently requires looking at domestic capacity. It is precisely here that the thesis of neoclassical realism, according to which systemic pressures are translated into foreign policy through filters within the state, comes into play (Rose, 1998; Ripsman et al., 2016). The original contribution of the findings is to render visible, among these filters, an institution that has hitherto gone almost unmentioned: the social security system. That a state forced to channel a significant share of its resources into pension deficits sees its hand weakened in diplomacy, defence, development assistance and technology investment is not an abstract assumption but the natural consequence of budget arithmetic.

The third pillar of the findings concerns the demographic transition, and the picture here shows that the problem is deeper than commonly assumed. Population ageing does not merely increase the number of pensioners; by shrinking the share of the working-age population, it affects the contribution base, domestic demand and tax revenues simultaneously (Lee & Mason, 2011; Harper, 2014). Türkiye's situation is particularly striking in this respect. The country is living through Europe's ageing

process within a much shorter span of time; the transformation that Western European countries absorbed over the course of a century is being compressed into a few decades in Türkiye. TÜİK projections show that the decline in fertility and the rise in the share of the elderly population are advancing faster than expected (TÜİK, 2024). This speed shortens the time available for adjustment and increases, year by year, the cost of postponing reform. At the same time, it would be wrong to read demographic ageing as fate. The approach that measures ageing through remaining life expectancy reveals that the health, education and productivity profile of a sixty-five-year-old today differs greatly from that of a sixty-five-year-old fifty years ago (Sanderson & Scherbov, 2013). This perspective unsettles the classical assumption that treats advanced ages as a passive period of dependency and constitutes the demographic foundation of the active-ageing-based model defended in this study. The problem is not that the population is ageing, but that institutions are still designed for a young population.

The findings on the labour market complete this reading. Informal employment stands out as the most important structural problem eroding the contribution base. Informality is not only today's revenue loss; every person working informally is tomorrow's elderly person without contributions or with a meagre pension, and the drift of these people towards social assistance in old age carries the burden back to the budget. Studies on the causes of the informal economy show that the problem is fed not only by weak enforcement but also by the perceived weight of tax and contribution burdens, by distrust of institutions and by the structure of the labour market (Castells & Portes, 1989; Schneider & Enste, 2000). For this reason, the way to increase formality lies not simply in raising penalties but in a whole that makes registered work meaningful for both employer and employee. Low female employment is the second critical heading. Raising women's labour force participation is the largest potential source for directly widening the contribution base. Yet the model proposed in this study does not treat female employment merely as a matter of numbers; it envisages that, in the three-to-five-year period following the birth of each child, the mother may, if she wishes, withdraw from working life, and that this period be counted in the pension calculation as if contributions had been paid. Practices in countries such as Germany, Sweden and France that convert childcare periods into pension entitlements show that a design in which care labour is not rendered invisible is possible (OECD, 2023). Such a design also supports fertility, thereby contributing to the system's long-term contribution base; today's expenditure is tomorrow's revenue. The situation of the young constitutes the third link. In societies where youth unemployment becomes entrenched, young people begin paying contributions late and irregularly, which damages both their own pension rights and the intergenerational balance of the system. It is known that the scars left on the young by economic crises persist for years (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). The weakening of trust in the system among younger generations is a silent threat that may, in the long run, also erode the ethic of contribution payment.

The most contested and at the same time most original proposal of the study is the gradual raising of the mandatory retirement age to the seventy to seventy-five range for workers and the seventy-five to eighty range for civil servants, together with the lightening of the workload of employees over sixty according to seniority, so that the working environment is transformed, as it were, into an avocation,

a professional activity pursued with pleasure. The international foundations of this proposal are strong. Comparative multi-country research has demonstrated that systems encouraging early retirement effectively pull workers out of the labour force and that this imposes heavy costs on both individuals and public finances (Gruber & Wise, 1999, 2004, 2007). That keeping the retirement age fixed while life expectancy lengthens is actuarially untenable is by now widely accepted in the economics of ageing (Börsch-Supan, 2007, 2013). Indeed, Denmark and the Netherlands have automatically linked the retirement age to life expectancy, while Japan and South Korea have developed comprehensive programmes supporting employment at advanced ages (OECD, 2019). Research on the productivity of older workers likewise shows that, even if there is some decline in speed-intensive tasks, capacities such as experience, judgement, composure in moments of crisis and institutional memory are preserved with age, and indeed strengthened (Skirbekk, 2008; Göbel & Zwick, 2012). The issue, in other words, is not the unproductiveness of the older worker but the failure to redesign work according to age. This is precisely the essence of the proposed model: a career architecture in which the physical burden diminishes as age advances and work shifts towards advisory, supervisory, instructional and mentoring roles where experience is most valuable. In such an architecture, a long working life becomes not a punishment but a dignified period in which accumulated knowledge is transferred to society.

The second face of the long-working-life proposal, at least as important as the age threshold itself, is the question of how the accumulated knowledge of older workers is to be transferred to society. The knowledge produced by a working life of forty or fifty years is not of the kind that can be written down in books or regulations alone; a significant part of it is tacit knowledge that can be transmitted only by working together, by showing and by living it out (Polanyi, 1966). The physician who recognises the signs of a disease not from a textbook table but from thousands of patients, the master craftsman who diagnoses a fault from the sound of a machine, the manager who senses a crisis before the reports arrive—these carry the real memory of institutions. In systems where the retirement age is kept low, this memory is shown the door en masse every year, and institutions learn by making the same mistakes all over again with new generations. The shift of post-sixty work in the proposed model towards advisory, supervisory, instructional and master-apprentice roles is aimed precisely at preventing this waste. When older employees move into positions freed from the pressure of daily production and heavy working hours, concentrating on the tasks where their experience is most precious, work ceases to be a burden and becomes a meaningful pursuit that sustains their identity and social bonds. That remaining productive in old age protects mental health, cognitive function and life satisfaction is among the consistent findings of ageing research (Walker, 2002; Foster & Walker, 2015). In such a design the winner is not only the system: institutions retain their memory, the young retain their masters, the old retain their sense of meaning, and social security retains a member who both continues to pay contributions and postpones drawing a pension. A country that does not waste experience is a country that uses the whole of its human capital, and the contribution of this to national power is more lasting than that of any natural resource.

Nevertheless, to overlook the limits and risks of this proposal would leave the discussion incomplete. Raising the retirement age does not mean the same thing for everyone. The healthy life expectancy of

those employed in heavy physical work is markedly shorter than that of those in desk-based occupations; if a uniform age threshold ignores this difference, the burden of reform may fall on the weakest shoulders. Moreover, because of the relationship between educational attainment and length of life, late retirement may disproportionately shorten the period during which lower-income groups draw a pension. For this reason, the model defended in this study is not a crude regulation that raises the age threshold in isolation; it comprises, as an integrated whole, transition timetables differentiated by occupational group, arduous-work allowances, flexible arrangements combining partial retirement with work, and the mandatory lightening of the workload at advanced ages. As the active ageing literature also warns, reducing the concept merely to an instrument for lengthening working time is problematic both ethically and practically; what matters is that participation at advanced ages be voluntary, healthy and meaningful (Boudiny, 2013; Foster & Walker, 2015). The World Health Organization's active ageing framework likewise stipulates that the pillars of participation, health and security be built together (WHO, 2002; Walker, 2006). In short, the success of the proposal depends less on the age threshold than on the construction of a working environment that makes working to that age genuinely possible and attractive. When this condition is met, employment at advanced ages offers the system a double gain: the person continues to pay contributions and begins drawing a pension later.

Another precondition of a long working life is a continuous learning infrastructure that keeps people employable into their seventies. Human capital theory demonstrates that the returns to investment in education and skills grow as the working life lengthens (Becker, 1993); when the working life approaches fifty years, it is evident that skills acquired in youth will not suffice on their own. In an era in which technology transforms occupations several times within a few decades, programmes enabling workers in their mid-forties and fifties to reskill are the obligatory complement of every reform that raises the retirement age. Behind the success of the Nordic countries in older-age employment lie not merely age thresholds but systematic investment in adult education and regulations encouraging employers to hire older workers (OECD, 2019). For Türkiye, this means mobilising labour market institutions, professional organisations and the education system simultaneously with pension reform. The fight against age discrimination is part of this whole; it is a contradiction to expect people who are excluded from recruitment and promotion on grounds of age to work until seventy. In short, the retirement age can be raised by a clause of law; but a society able to work to that age is built over years as the joint product of education, health and labour market policies. Where this integrity is not achieved, age reforms remain on paper, people effectively drop out of the labour force long before the official retirement age, and the expected fiscal gain fails to materialise.

The proposal on the pension accrual rate—raising pensions to seventy-five per cent, and under certain conditions eighty per cent, of the final and highest wage—must likewise be discussed with the same two-sided care. At first sight this proposal may appear to conflict with the goal of financial sustainability, since raising pensions increases expenditure. Yet the fundamental warning of the pensions literature lies precisely here: sustainability must be considered together with the system's fulfilment of its purpose, not merely with the compression of expenditure. A fiscal balance achieved

by pushing pensions towards the poverty line destroys the system's reason for existence and shifts the burden onto social assistance, families and political tension (Barr & Diamond, 2008). That rolling back the welfare state carries hidden economic and social costs has been powerfully demonstrated in the literature (Atkinson, 1999). In the Turkish case, it is likewise argued in the national literature that the accrual rates lowered after 2008 will erode pensions over the long run and that the social consequences of this will be severe (Alper, 2021). In the proposed model, higher pensions are not an unfunded generosity; their financing is tied to the additional contribution years brought by the lengthened working life, to the growth of formality and to the efficient management of the institution's resources. That a person who has paid contributions for many years should be able to sustain old age at a standard close to that of the working years is a requirement both of equity and of the system's credibility. The contribution that a broad mass of pensioners living in comfort makes to domestic demand, voluntary activity, intra-family solidarity and social peace turns this expenditure from a mere cost into an investment in social stability. Historical evidence showing that public social spending does not stifle growth in the long run and can, when well designed, coexist with the economy also supports this reading (Lindert, 2004).

The social counterpart of the accrual rate proposal must also be made concrete. That pensions be set at a level preserving the standard of living of the working years is not merely a matter of the pensioner's individual welfare; in a country with more than ten million pensioners, retirement incomes are among the determinants of domestic demand, the rental market, small trade and the flows of intra-family solidarity. The pensioner whose income erodes first cuts spending, then consumes savings, and finally leans on children or social assistance; that is, the bill the system does not pay does not disappear, but is carried into households and into other lines of the budget. A secure old age, by contrast, sets a chain running in the opposite direction: pensioners receiving regular and adequate incomes nourish the local economy through their consumption, contribute to society through invisible labours ranging from caring for grandchildren to voluntary work, and workers who see that vested rights are protected place their trust in the system and in the state. It is no coincidence that in countries where old-age poverty is low, social unrest and generational conflict also run low (OECD, 2023). The pension paid to the retiree is, from this angle, not only the return on past labour but a regularly renewed insurance premium for social peace. The seventy-five to eighty per cent band defended in this study should be understood as a point of balance that serves these two functions—equity and stability—at once; its financing is designed to be met by longer contribution periods, expanding registered employment and efficient fund management.

At this point it is impossible not to touch on the political economy of reform, for although the solutions indicated by the findings are technically well known, they remain unimplemented in many countries of the world. Pension reforms are typical examples of measures that distribute costs to today's voters and benefits to future generations, and this structure pushes governments towards blame avoidance, towards postponing reforms or diluting them (Pierson, 2001; Bonoli, 2000). The Turkish experience is instructive in this respect. Decisions lowering the retirement age in the early period had fiscal consequences lasting decades; subsequent regulations raising age thresholds met each time with strong

social resistance; and, as seen in the question of those caught by the retirement-age changes, the tension between expectations of vested rights and actuarial necessities occupied the political agenda for a long time. The lesson to be drawn is that it is not enough for reforms to be correctly designed; they must also be explained honestly to society, their transition periods must be constructed fairly, and they must be carried out with the broadest possible consensus. Sweden's reform, based on long transitions protecting acquired rights and on cross-party consensus, and the automatic adjustment mechanisms tying pension parameters to life expectancy stand out as institutional solutions that remove reform from being renegotiated at every election (Holzmann, 2013; ISSA, 2022). Mechanisms of this kind, by partially insulating social security from the fluctuations of daily politics, increase the predictability of both the system and the state.

Another lesson taught by the Turkish experience with respect to the politics of reform is the cumulative cost of short-term political interventions that corrode the integrity of the system. The repetition of contribution amnesties and restructurings at regular intervals virtually punishes the employer who pays debts on time and turns non-payment into a rational strategy; the obligor who believes the next amnesty will come prefers to let contributions wait. Entitlements expanded in election periods in disregard of actuarial calculation, service-purchase facilities and early retirement openings likewise sacrifice the system's long-term balance to short-term political gain (Alper, 2021). Each of these interventions may appear small on its own; their sum, however, erodes belief in the predictability and rules of the system. In a system where adherence to rules becomes the exception and the exception becomes the rule, the most rational behaviour is not to abide by the rule but to wait for the exception, and as this behaviour spreads, the system dissolves from within. The remedy indicated by international experience is to place social security parameters at a relative distance from the reach of daily politics and to tie changes to actuarial impact analysis and long-term rules (ISSA, 2022). One may contemplate establishing, for the fundamental parameters of social security, an analogue of the predictability that central bank independence has provided in monetary policy; Sweden's automatic balancing mechanism is, indeed, the product of precisely such rule-based insulation. When rules are raised above politics, the system begins to breathe both fiscally and in terms of trust.

The question of institutional trust emerges from the findings as a variable that often remains in the shadows yet is decisive for the future of the system. The citizen's belief that the contribution paid today will be repaid thirty years hence is the real capital on which social security is founded. When this belief is shaken, the willingness to pay contributions weakens, the drift into informality accelerates, and as the system loses revenue, trust erodes further; distrust, in other words, creates a self-fulfilling vicious circle. That the perception of institutions as fair and impartial nourishes social cooperation is a core finding of the trust literature (Putnam, 2000; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Seen in this light, the quality of the SSI's services, the transparency of its transactions, its accountability regarding how its funds are managed and its insulation from political interference are as important as its actuarial parameters. The social memory of the institution's resources having been diverted from their purpose in the past is one of the important sources of today's trust deficit; and the way to erase that memory runs through the institutionalisation of international good practice in fund management, independent audit and regular

public reporting. The transparency standards of the Norwegian wealth fund and the professional, autonomous governance structures of the Canadian and Dutch pension funds are examples showing that accumulated resources can be both protected and grown (World Bank, 2005; OECD, 2023). Digitalisation adds a powerful lever to this picture. It is known that digital transformation in public administration accelerates service processes and renders administration more traceable (Mergel, Edelmann, & Haug, 2019). The detection of informality through data analytics, the prevention of fraudulent transactions and the weeding out of waste in health spending are instruments that generate savings without curtailing entitlements, and are therefore also politically feasible.

Nor should the question of resource management be read solely within the framework of the fight against corruption; the findings show that the productive deployment of accumulated social security resources is in itself a financing channel for the system's future. World experience offers two polar examples in this regard. At one pole stand countries where pension savings were channelled, according to political priorities, into low-yield areas and melted away against inflation; at the other, countries that, through professional, autonomous and transparent boards, invested their funds in diversified portfolios and provided the system with regular returns (World Bank, 1994, 2005). It should not be forgotten that pension funds are at the same time institutional investors that deepen domestic capital markets and supply patient capital to long-term infrastructure and technology investment. In this respect, a well-managed social security fund performs a double function, both closing the system's deficit and contributing to the country's development finance. The lesson for Türkiye is that the quality of governance of the resources accumulated and to be accumulated in complementary pension pillars is a strategic matter at least as important as contribution rates. Even where differences in returns appear small, their compound effects reach enormous magnitudes over decades; a difference of one percentage point in annual returns can produce, over a working life, a difference of between a quarter and a third of the accumulated savings. For this reason, merit in fund management, independent audit and decision-making mechanisms insulated from politics are not technical details but constitutive elements of the systems, and hence the state's, long-term strength.

The findings of behavioural economics also offer guidance in strengthening complementary pension pillars. That people systematically discount the distant future, tend to postpone saving decisions and cling strongly to default options are by now well-known behavioural patterns. Designs that take these patterns into account can raise participation strikingly without resorting to compulsion: models in which employees are enrolled automatically with the freedom to opt out, and programmes in which a portion of future wage increases is committed to saving in advance, have lifted participation rates far above those of voluntary systems (Thaler & Benartzi, 2004). The United Kingdom's automatic enrolment reform and Australia's compulsory employer-contribution savings system have shown that these principles can be applied at national scale and can cover broad populations within a short time (OECD, 2023). That opt-out rates remained high in Türkiye's automatic enrolment experiment is a result stemming less from the instrument itself than from its design; unless the attractiveness of contribution levels, the visibility of state support, the return performance of the funds and public trust in the system are improved together, automatic enrolment cannot produce lasting behavioural change.

The lesson to be drawn is that second and third pillars must be built not as alternatives to the public system but as its complements, resting upon a public pillar that inspires confidence. The Turkish experience has shown clearly that the citizen who does not trust the public pillar does not trust the private pillar either; trust is a whole, and it is built starting from the broadest system.

The recent history of the global reform wave also contains cautionary lessons here. The individual-account-based privatisation model, propagated across the world in the 1990s under the leadership of international organisations, was presented as the definitive solution to the problems of pay-as-you-go systems and was implemented in nearly thirty countries, above all in Latin America and Eastern Europe (World Bank, 1994; Orenstein, 2008). The balance sheet of the intervening quarter century, however, has fallen short of expectations: administrative costs eroded savings, coverage failed to expand, market fluctuations rendered retirement incomes uncertain, and states were crushed under the transition cost. Chile, the pioneer country, was compelled in 2008 to add a strong public solidarity pillar to its system; countries such as Argentina and Hungary renationalised individual accounts, and many countries partially reversed their reforms (Mesa-Lago, 2008; Barr & Diamond, 2008). The lesson of this experience is not the redundancy of private saving but its limitation: market-based pillars are valuable as complements to the system, but they are not suited to being the backbone of old-age security, because they load market risk onto the individual's shoulders, whereas the very reason for social security's existence is the collective sharing of risk. That the model proposed in this study places a strong public pillar at the centre is not an ideological preference but the distilled conclusion of world experience. The same experience also shows that no ready-made recipe works independently of country context; success comes less from the model itself than from the skill with which it is adapted to the country's institutional fabric.

The health dimension of the discussion is the front that usually remains in the shadow of pensions yet is fiscally the fastest growing. That health and care expenditures in ageing populations grow faster than pension expenditures is established by international data (OECD, 2023; United Nations, 2023). The spread of chronic disease, the cost of advanced treatment technologies and the growth of the need for long-term care make general health insurance the real testing ground of the coming decades. The solution indicated by the findings at this point is not to compress spending but to reduce the burden of disease. The healthy ageing approach shows that investment in preventive health services, early diagnosis, healthy living habits and service models preserving the functionality of the elderly can significantly lower care costs at advanced ages (WHO, 2021). The same approach is also the precondition of the long-working-life model proposed in this study; people can remain productive into their seventies only to the extent that they remain healthy. Health policy and pension policy, in other words, are not separate budget lines but two faces of the same strategy. Every resource spent today on preventive health returns to the system through two channels, reducing both tomorrow's health expenditure and the pressure for early retirement. The weeding out of waste in health spending, of unnecessary tests and medication, stands as the largest field of saving achievable without touching the citizen's entitlements.

A heading requiring separate treatment within the health dimension of ageing is the question of long-term care. The growth of the population reaching its eighties and nineties creates a new field of need that requires care more than treatment, lasts for years, and strains families both materially and morally. In systems that ignore this need, the burden falls on informal care labour, overwhelmingly on women; and women who withdraw from the labour force because of care lose both today's contribution revenue and their own pension rights of tomorrow. The compulsory care insurance schemes established by Germany in 1995 and Japan in 2000 have shown that this risk too, like sickness and old age, can be shared collectively (Campbell & Ikegami, 2000). Although care insurance appears at first sight to add a new expenditure line to social security, it in fact generates three gains: it spreads across the whole population an unpredictable risk that devastates families, it converts care services into registered employment and thereby widens the contribution base, and it makes it easier for women to remain in the labour force. Türkiye's family-based care tradition has kept this need invisible until today; but as household structures shrink and female employment rises, the absence of an institutional care guarantee is a candidate for becoming one of the most painful social problems of the coming years. The social security architecture of an ageing Türkiye should begin now to debate adding care security as a third pillar alongside pensions and health, for institutionalisation in this field, like pensions, is a construction requiring decades.

Turning to the foreign policy and geostrategic power leg of the findings, a measured yet clear interpretation is possible here as well. The health of the social security system does not by itself make any country a regional or global power; the classical elements of power, such as geography, military capacity, economic size, technology and the diplomatic network, retain their decisive weight (Morgenthau, 2005; Kennedy, 1987). What the findings show is a subtler relationship: social security is not the direct source of power, but one of the ground conditions determining the sustainability of power production. This relationship operates through three channels. The first channel is fiscal latitude; a system whose deficits are under control preserves the space in the budget that can be allocated to defence, diplomacy, technology and development cooperation. The second channel is social resilience; a state that has secured the basic guarantees of its citizens can sustain resistance to external pressures, sanctions and crises over a longer horizon, because its home front is solid. It is known from historical examples that states which have lost their social support in critical periods have been forced to retreat from foreign policy objectives (Zakaria, 1998; Taliaferro, 2006). It was shown long ago that the ability of leading states to sustain the stability of the international economic order depends on the strength of their domestic resource base (Kindleberger, 1981), and that the erosion of the state's position in the economy and society directly weakens its capacity for external influence (Strange, 1996). Classical analyses demonstrating that foreign policy output is shaped not only by systemic position but also by the quality of domestic decision-making structures and bureaucratic processes support this reading as well (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Halperin et al., 2006; Hermann, 2001). The third channel is reputation and attraction. A country able to offer its citizens a humane old age and guaranteed access to health projects outwards not only wealth but the capacity to govern and a claim to serve as a model. Considering that soft power feeds on countries' values, the attractiveness of their domestic orders and

the legitimacy of their policies (Nye, 2004, 2011), it is no coincidence that the international weight of the Scandinavian countries is disproportionately larger than their populations. An important source of these countries' diplomatic standing is the order of security and justice they have built at home.

The place of the foreign policy connection within the classical debate on power can be sharpened further through the guns-versus-butter dilemma. That states must divide their resources between welfare and defence, and that this division carries strategic consequences, is one of the fundamental themes of the history of power transitions; the role played by domestic obligations becoming unbearable in the decline of empires has been strikingly documented (Kennedy, 1987). Yet to read this dilemma as a rigid either-or choice is misleading. An unsustainable social security system does not yield savings for defence; on the contrary, as its deficits seize the budget, it squeezes all strategic lines, defence included. A system whose fiscal balance is secured, by contrast, softens the trade-off between welfare and power: the state is not forced to give up its power to protect its citizens, nor its citizens to protect its power. The concept of strategic autonomy also comes into play here; a state with low dependence on external debt markets and external support can take foreign policy decisions under fewer external constraints (Baldwin, 2016; Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). The grand strategy literature likewise stresses that long-term strategic objectives can be realistic only when they rest on a sustainable domestic resource base, and that overextension and commitments beyond one's resources accelerate strategic decline (Posen, 2014; Dueck, 2015). The soundness of the domestic order has been shown, in studies of order-building, to be among the fundamental conditions of the capacity to construct and sustain international order as well (Ikenberry, 2001). In a country where social security deficits swell the public debt, the fragility brought by that debt invisibly limits foreign policy flexibility; as the interest burden grows and the currency market fluctuates with every political tension, the state's hand at international tables weakens. Actuarial balance is therefore a silent parameter not only of social policy but of national security strategy. The state that can carry its domestic obligations is both more credible and more resilient abroad; this link translates the foreign policy loop of the chain constructed in this study into the language of the classical debate on power.

The dimension of national resilience is one of the concrete arenas in which this relationship is tested. The shocks of recent years—pandemics, earthquakes, economic turbulence and regional conflicts—have shown that the real strength of states is measured not in ordinary times but in moments of crisis. During the pandemic, countries with strong social protection systems were able rapidly to activate unemployment benefits, short-time working schemes and health guarantees, protecting both public health and the economic fabric, whereas countries lacking this infrastructure paid a far heavier social cost for the shock (ILO, 2024). Disaster and crisis research demonstrates that the speed with which communities recover after shocks depends to a large extent on institutional networks and social capital built beforehand (Norris et al., 2008; Aldrich, 2012; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). The social security system is the widest and most institutionalised of these networks; no other structure can reach millions of households from a single centre. The concepts of preparedness and adaptive capacity emphasised in the crisis management literature point in the same direction (Comfort et al., 2010): resilience cannot be built on the day of the crisis; it is accumulated over years, through functioning institutions. From

this angle, investment in social security can be read as a kind of national insurance premium, whose return becomes most visible on the darkest day.

That the resilience debate is far from abstract for Türkiye has been shown by recent experience. The earthquakes of 2023 revealed, in the wake of a devastation that changed the lives of tens of thousands and the daily order of millions in an instant, what kind of buffering function the social security system can perform: the uninterrupted payment of pensions, the deferral of contribution obligations, the continuation of health services without checking entitlement status, and the activation of instruments akin to short-time working were among the mechanisms limiting the social cost of the catastrophe. A similar picture was seen during the pandemic; the short-time working allowance and restrictions on dismissals braked the unravelling of the labour market. These experiences demonstrate concretely that a social security infrastructure which appears in ordinary times as a line of expenditure turns, in the moment of crisis, into a priceless instrument of state capacity. Yet the same experiences also contain a warning: the effect of crisis instruments is limited by the system's fiscal health in ordinary times. A system without reserves, dependent on transfers even in ordinary times, cannot sustain this buffering function under successive shocks; for a country situated on an earthquake belt and standing amid regional instabilities, this is a vulnerability that cannot be afforded. Considering that resilience to disasters is a matter of fiscal and institutional preparedness as much as of infrastructure and building stock, the strengthening of social security should also be read as an implicit component of Türkiye's disaster strategy.

Along the same line, the findings also suggest that social security should be repositioned within the expanding understanding of security. That security is not confined to military threats but comprises economic, societal and environmental dimensions has long been accepted in security studies (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Baldwin, 1997). The human security approach carried this expansion down to the individual, treating freedom from fear and freedom from want as the essential content of security (UNDP, 1994; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Seen from this frame, the protection of millions of people against the risks of old age, sickness and unemployment is directly a matter of security. Critical approaches that foreground the societal and identity dimensions of security have emphasised that security is less an objective condition than a socially constructed relationship that cannot be considered apart from the welfare of the individual (Booth, 2007; McSweeney, 1999). Analyses showing that inter-state relations involve not mere anarchy but frequently hierarchical patterns of authority likewise indicate that the bond between domestic order and external position cannot be ignored (Lake, 2009). At the same time, the criticism that the concept of human security loses its analytical sharpness when stretched too far contains a justified warning (Paris, 2001; Chandler, 2014). The approach adopted in this study is not to dissolve social security into an all-encompassing security discourse, but to describe its effect on national power through traceable channels with well-defined boundaries, namely fiscal space, social resilience and legitimacy. Another risk of securitising the concept is the instrumentalisation of social policy under a logic of emergency; whereas the thesis here is precisely the opposite: social security produces power because it functions in the ordinary course of things.

The findings on international competitiveness likewise point to a similarly indirect relationship. Competitiveness is classically defined through cost, productivity and innovation (Porter, 1990); contemporary competitiveness measurements also take into account institutional quality, human capital and social stability (Schwab, 2019). Social security plays a two-sided role within this broad definition. On one side, high contribution burdens can raise labour costs and strain competitiveness; on the other, a well-functioning guarantee system facilitates mobility in the labour market, enables workers to take risks and turn towards retraining, and, by preserving social peace, renders the investment climate predictable. The comparative capitalism literature shows that advanced economies use their social protection institutions not as an obstacle to their competitive strength but as the complement of their production models (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Huber & Stephens, 2012). Denmark's flexicurity model is the well-known example: dismissal is easy, but the person who loses a job is met with strong income support and an intensive re-employment programme; thus the economy preserves its flexibility and society its security. The lesson emerging for Türkiye is that social security reform should be designed not as a cost-cutting operation but as a component of a competitiveness strategy constructed jointly with labour market, education and industrial policies.

The tension between the findings and the widespread conviction about the relationship with economic growth also deserves discussion. For many years social spending was viewed as a weight against growth, on the assumption that resources were being diverted from productive uses to consumption. Historical data show, however, that countries with high social spending have not exhibited low growth over the long run, and that well-designed social protection systems support growth indirectly by nourishing human capital, the stock of health and social peace (Lindert, 2004; Atkinson, 1999). The concept of the demographic window of opportunity also carries weight in this context: periods in which the share of the working-age population is high can, when combined with the right employment and saving policies, deliver rapid growth (Bloom, Canning, & Fink, 2010). Türkiye is at a stage where this window is closing; using the remaining time productively is a historic threshold for both growth and social security. Since in an ageing society the source of growth can no longer be population increase, what remains is productivity, technology, and longer, healthier, better-qualified working lives. This renders the economic logic of the model proposed in this study visible once more: employment at advanced ages and female employment are the two largest idle resources in the hands of an ageing Türkiye.

The migration option, raised from time to time against demographic contraction, must also be placed within a realistic frame. The idea that reinforcing the working-age population through migration could ease the fiscal pressure of ageing is attractive at first sight; calculations show, however, that the migrant numbers required to offset ageing through migration alone reach magnitudes no society could bear (United Nations, 2000). Migrants, moreover, also age; migration therefore does not solve the problem but postpones it. That said, a well-managed migration policy can be an auxiliary element of the equation: selective admission oriented to the skills the labour market needs, the rapid transition of migrants into registered employment and their full participation in the social security system can generate a genuine contribution to the premium base. Türkiye's situation is distinctive in this respect:

the country hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world, yet the share of this population in registered employment remains low. Raising the formality of the existing migrant population stands as an untried resource that would both reduce unfair competition and informality and contribute to contribution revenues. In conclusion, migration cannot substitute for the reform package; but it can be one of the levers supporting a well-designed package. The truth that the real solution must be sought at home, in the support of employment and fertility, remains unchanged.

While the future of the contribution base is being discussed, it should not be overlooked that working life itself is in transformation. The growth of the platform economy, the spread of remote work and the multiplication of task-based forms of employment are eroding the classical employer-employee relationship on which social security was built. A growing mass of people earning income through platforms as couriers, drivers, software developers or content creators holds, in most countries, neither full employee nor fully self-employed status, and this ambiguity leaves them outside or at the margins of the guarantee system (ILO, 2024). This is not a problem of the workers concerned alone; the exclusion of a growing portion of employment from the contribution base is a new form of informality that structurally narrows the system's revenue base. Adapting a social security architecture designed for the employment patterns of the industrial age to this diversification of work forms is one of the fundamental institutional tasks of the coming period. The searches under way around the world for guarantee models that are independent of status, that follow the person, and that can collect contributions flexibly from different types of income show that this adaptation is possible. In a society such as Türkiye's, young and rapidly integrating into the digital economy, making this adaptation early would mean preventing tomorrow's informality today. The future of the system lies not only in closing today's deficit but in preparing now for tomorrow's world of work.

A close reading of comparative country experience lends concreteness to the findings. Sweden, by moving in the 1990s to a notional account system tying the pension entitlement to contributions paid and to the course of the economy, built an architecture enabling the system to balance itself; in this architecture, when demographic or economic conditions deteriorate, the parameters adjust automatically, so that no new political crisis has to be endured for every correction (Holzmann, Palmer, & Robalino, 2012). Germany introduced a sustainability factor tying pension increases to the ratio of workers to pensioners; Japan applied a similar indexation adjusting pensions to demographic reality (Whiteford & Whitehouse, 2006). The Netherlands and Denmark, for their part, distributed risk across layers by adding widespread occupational pension funds on top of a strong public pillar (Queisser, Whitehouse, & Whiteford, 2007; Whitehouse, 2007). The common lesson of these experiences is threefold: first, single-pillar systems are fragile, and risk must be distributed across layers; second, adjustment mechanisms must be bound to rules and moved outside ordinary politics; third, no reform wins social acceptance without protecting acquired rights and granting long transition periods. For Türkiye the meaning of these lessons is not the demolition of the existing system and its replacement; it is the binding of the public pillar to actuarial rules, the strengthening of complementary pillars and the management of transitions through fair timetables. That the word reform has come to be

synonymous in society with loss of rights is the legacy of past practice; the way to break that perception lies in designs that consolidate the structure while protecting rights, with many winners and few losers.

The question of intergenerational justice deserves separate treatment as the invisible axis of this whole discussion. Pay-as-you-go systems are, in essence, an unwritten contract established between generations: today's worker finances today's pensioner and trusts, in return, that tomorrow's worker will finance him or her. The demographic transition is silently altering the arithmetic of this contract; an ever-narrowing mass of workers is being made to carry an ever-widening mass of pensioners (Lee & Mason, 2011; United Nations, 2023). The postponement of reforms is a choice that appears to hurt no one; in reality it transfers the cost to the constituency with the smallest voice, to generations not yet born or not yet able to vote. From this angle actuarial balance is not a dry accounting concept but the measure of fairness between generations. The combination of longer working life and higher pensions in the model proposed in this study aims to repair this contract from two directions: on one side, the burden is balanced by lengthening each generation's period of contribution to the system; on the other, the young generations' faith in the system is preserved by guaranteeing the return on their contribution. The survival of the contract depends on every generation believing both that it will receive the return on what it pays and that it will leave behind a system that can be carried by those who come after. When that belief disappears, flight from the system begins; as the flight grows, the burden on those who remain increases, and the contract dissolves. Perhaps the deepest layer of domestic stability is the keeping alive of this silent contract between generations.

The meaning of the findings for Türkiye specifically becomes still clearer when set within this general frame. Türkiye's social security journey has passed through major transformations, from a fragmented structure to a single roof, from the liquidation of the early retirement legacy to the re-establishment of parameters with the 2008 reform; despite this, the system continues to depend on budget transfers (Alper, 2021; Arıcı, 2015). The national literature draws attention to the distinctive character of the Turkish welfare regime, which leans on family solidarity and informal relations (Buğra & Keyder, 2006; Buğra, 2008). This character has covered the gaps of the system until today; but urbanisation, the changing social roles of women and the shrinking of household structures are weakening the carrying capacity of family-based solidarity. Türkiye, in other words, faces the fiscal squeeze of the formal system precisely at the moment when informal safety nets are dissolving; the urgency of the problem stems from this. Actuarial studies show that under existing parameters the system's settlement into long-term balance is difficult, and that the ratio of contribution revenues to pension payments hovers around critical thresholds (Erdem, 2022; Yaşarlar, 2016). When the persistence of high informal employment, the decline in the active-to-passive ratio and social discontent over the erosion of pensions are considered together, the vicious circle risk indicated by the findings is not an abstract possibility for Türkiye but a proximate threat. Yet the same findings also show the hopeful side: the growth potential in female employment, the young and comparatively educated population, the sophistication of the digital public infrastructure and the institutional accumulation in the health system suggest that, with the right reform package, the circle can be turned in a positive direction. The intense foreign policy agenda brought by Türkiye's geopolitical position makes this reform all the more

valuable; for a regional power whose home front is not solid finds it difficult to make long-breathed moves in foreign policy.

The discussion conducted to this point also provides a frame for the multi-causal problem structure set out in the findings section as a whole. When the causes feeding the SSI's fiscal squeeze are enumerated one by one, a long list emerges; yet these causes are not a scattered heap but can be read as four layers that feed one another. The first layer is demographic: ageing, low fertility and lengthening life expectancy are invalidating the population assumptions on which the system was built. The second layer belongs to the labour market: informality, low female employment, youth unemployment and low productivity keep the contribution base below what it should be. The third layer is institutional and managerial: the inefficient use of resources, weaknesses in fund management, waste in health spending and gaps in audit cause even the resources at hand to melt away. The fourth layer is political: the early retirement legacy, contribution amnesties, election-period expansions and decisions severed from actuarial calculation magnify the problems produced by the first three layers. The importance of this layered structure is as follows: reforms that focus on a single layer are doomed to fail. A reform that only raises the retirement age cannot widen the contribution base if it does not touch informality; a reform that only tightens audit cannot establish balance if it does not see the demographic reality. The strength of the model proposed in this study comes precisely from its touching all four layers at once: the long working life answers the demographic layer; female and migrant employment together with formalisation answer the labour market layer; fund governance and digital audit answer the institutional layer; and rule-based parameter management answers the political layer. Just as the problem accumulated layer by layer, the solution too can be built only layer by layer, and simultaneously.

The dimension of the findings concerning national integration completes this picture. Social security is not merely a mechanism transferring income; it is an institution that reproduces the bond of citizenship every month. That social rights are a constitutive element of citizenship was powerfully established in classical citizenship theory (Marshall, 1992). A system in which everyone who pays contributions feeds the same pool and benefits from the same guarantee brings different income groups, regions and generations together in a shared community of fate. That inclusive and universal systems enjoy stronger social support than narrow programmes targeting only the poor, and are more successful in redistribution, is a well-known finding of comparative research (Korpi & Palme, 1998; Korpi, 2006). Viewed from the reverse angle, the weakening of the system also erodes this sense of shared fate; as each person turns to fending for themselves, the social fabric thins. The strengthening of social security is therefore an investment in social integration as much as an economic one, and its effect on domestic stability operates most durably through this channel.

A final condition regarding the social legitimacy of reform is the inclusiveness of decision-making processes. Social security is by definition the joint work of a tripartite structure, of workers, employers and the state; the contributions are paid by these three parties, and the consequences are borne by these three parties. Despite this, the preparation of reforms behind closed doors and their presentation to

society as a fait accompli has been, in Türkiye as in many countries of the world, the principal cause of resistance and reversal. The emphasis that international labour standards place on social dialogue is not merely a preference of principle but the product of a practical observation: reforms at whose table sit the unions, employer organisations, pensioner associations and professional bodies are both more evenly designed and meet less resistance in implementation (ILO, 2024). The secret of the Swedish reform's survival for a quarter century lies as much in its being the product of a cross-party and cross-stakeholder consensus as in its technical excellence. So that a field producing fifty-year consequences, such as social security, is not left in Türkiye to the mercy of four-to-five-year electoral cycles, the institutionalisation of the reform process itself should be contemplated: the regular sharing of actuarial reporting with the public, the binding of parametric changes to independent impact analysis, and the maturing of major transformations on broadly participatory platforms can turn reform from an operation performed in a moment of crisis into a continuous process of maintenance. Legitimacy is the real source that renders the cost of reform bearable in the eyes of society; without it, even the most correct design remains on paper.

The theoretical contribution of the findings can be summarised at two levels. The first is the broadening of the concept of state capacity. The capacity literature concentrates predominantly on tax collection, bureaucratic quality and the ability to enforce law (Besley & Persson, 2011; Dincecco & Katz, 2016; Hanson & Sigman, 2021). Studies analysing the historical bond between the institutional capacity of the state and the balances of class power and democratic development have shown that capacity is not merely technical but also a social construction (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992); the extent to which social policy choices in advanced capitalist democracies are interwoven with the politics of distribution has likewise been documented in detail (Beramendi et al., 2015). This study argues that social protection capacity, that is, the state's ability to secure its citizens against lifelong risks, should be recognised as an essential component of capacity. For social security is one of the most concrete manifestations of the state's infrastructural power, its ability to operate by penetrating the capillaries of society (Mann, 1984). A state able every month to deposit pensions into millions of households and to record and finance hundreds of millions of health transactions can carry this ability into other fields as well; the capacity claim of a state that cannot do this remains deficient. The second contribution is the construction of the bridge between domestic and foreign policy by way of social policy. Neoclassical realism, while accepting that domestic variables shape foreign policy, has mostly confined these variables to elite perceptions, regime type and the general character of state-society relations (Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2009; Ripsman et al., 2016). The explicit inclusion of social security systems in this theoretical frame both endows the realist literature with a new intervening variable and offers the social policy literature the opportunity to look through a window seldom opened until now, the window of national power. This bringing together of the two literatures is the study's principal original contribution to the field.

Stating the boundary conditions of this contribution does not weaken the claim; on the contrary, it increases its scientific value. Not every social security system with sound fiscal balance automatically produces geostrategic power. A system balanced by keeping coverage narrow, that is, by leaving the

greater part of the population outside, does not generate social stability and legitimacy even if its fiscal tableau looks good; what is decisive here is the joint achievement of sustainability and inclusiveness. Similarly, generous systems financed by natural resource revenues become fragile when resource prices fall, and the guarantee they provide leans on conjuncture rather than institutional capacity. Moreover, the foreign policy link of the chain operates with varying strength according to the country's position in the international system; for a regional power standing in the midst of great power competition, the strategic value of domestic stability is higher than for a sheltered small country. The historical and institutional diversity of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Castles et al., 2010) is likewise a reminder that there is no one-size-fits-all reform recipe; the parameters of the Swedish model cannot be transplanted to Türkiye as they stand, but its principles, automatic adjustment, inclusiveness and transparent fund governance, can be adapted. This conditional reading establishes that the model constructed here is not a mechanical determinism but a chain of tendencies that strengthens under specific conditions.

In interpreting the findings, certain considerations arising from the nature of the research must be kept in mind. Because the study rests on theoretical model-building and qualitative comparative assessment, the relationships set out are not statistically tested coefficients but strong tendencies supported by theoretical and historical justification. The difficulties in measuring concepts such as state capacity and foreign policy effectiveness are the shared problem of all research in this field, and existing governance indicators can offer only approximate measurements (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010). This situation constitutes an open agenda for future research. Panel studies examining social security sustainability indicators together with governance, stability and foreign policy performance measures across broad country samples could test the links of the chain constructed here one by one. In-depth country studies using process tracing could show how the mechanisms actually operate. The comparison of the long-term strategic performance of reforming countries with that of postponing countries offers opportunities in the nature of natural experiments. Furthermore, the testing of the model developed in this study in different regional and regime contexts will clarify the limits of the theory's generalisability.

When all these assessments are taken together, the picture that emerges is clear. Social security systems are the widest, most continuous and most tangible contract between state and society; rendering this contract fiscally bearable, socially adequate and institutionally trustworthy is a strategic choice whose effects extend far beyond pension payments. The findings show consistently that fiscal sustainability widens the state's room for manoeuvre, that the widened room for manoeuvre nourishes institutional trust and domestic stability, and that a solid home front provides continuity, credibility and resilience in foreign policy. This chain does not operate of its own accord; it strengthens subject to conditions such as inclusive design, fair transition, competent management and social consensus. The conclusion reached for Türkiye is this: the resolution of the SSI's financial problems is not the correction of a budget line, but a move of state-building that will jointly affect the country's domestic peace and its international weight over the coming half century. The deep-rooted political idea that regards keeping the human being alive as the precondition of the state's survival finds a contemporary and scientific

counterpart in the conclusions of this research: the state that secures its citizen is, in truth, securing its own power.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first and most fundamental conclusion reached by this study is that the financial sustainability of social security systems cannot be treated as a merely technical matter belonging to the fields of social policy or public finance. When the theoretical approaches, comparative country experiences and current social security data examined throughout the research are considered together, it becomes clear that social security systems exert direct effects on the overall capacity of states. A financially strong and sustainable social security system shapes citizens' expectations about the future in a positive direction and raises the level of social trust (Barr, 2020). Rising social trust, in turn, lays the groundwork for greater confidence in public institutions (Fukuyama, 1995). It is well established that in societies where trust in institutions is high, social cohesion is firmer and political stability is easier to preserve (Putnam, 2000). This accumulated capital also contributes to the strengthening of state capacity (Fukuyama, 2004). By contrast, the financial fragilities that emerge within a social security system are not confined to the field of pensions alone; they place lasting burdens on the public budget and narrow the resources the state can allocate to strategic areas such as defence, diplomacy, technology investment and human capital (Holzmann & Hinz, 2005). This picture indicates that social security policies cannot be considered independently of national development strategies. The conclusions reached show that social security institutions are not merely welfare-distributing bodies but strategic institutions that nourish state capacity, and that the central thesis advanced at the outset of the study has, in its broad outlines, been confirmed.

The second fundamental conclusion is the existence of a strong and multidimensional relationship between social security sustainability and domestic stability. Whereas the literature has mostly examined domestic stability through economic growth, income distribution or employment, this study has assessed the same phenomenon through the lens of social security. Growing confidence in the social security system raises social satisfaction (Rothstein, 2011). Social peace is stronger in systems where income loss in retirement is kept limited and individuals are able to preserve their living standards (Korpi & Palme, 1998). In countries where pensions remain inadequate or uncertainty about the system's future deepens, by contrast, social tensions have been observed to mount (Stiglitz, 2012). Moreover, social security systems shape the future expectations not only of the elderly population but also of individuals of working age. When people believe they will be secure in retirement, they participate more fully in economic and social life, and this participation nourishes economic vitality and societal resilience (Aldrich, 2012). The strengthening of social peace and institutional trust increases the state's resistance to economic fluctuations, natural disasters and international crises (Chandler, 2014). The cases examined demonstrate that countries which have carried out lasting reforms in the field of social security have been able to build higher institutional resilience over the long run. Social security reforms should therefore be assessed not only in terms of fiscal balances but also in terms of their contribution to domestic stability, for social security is one of the invisible yet most solid pillars of domestic stability.

The third fundamental conclusion is that the relationship between state capacity and social security systems is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Strong state capacity facilitates the establishment of sustainable social security systems, while sustainable social security systems in turn consolidate state capacity (Besley & Persson, 2011). States with high institutional capacity achieve better outcomes in social security thanks to effective supervision mechanisms, robust data infrastructures, high collection rates and a culture of long-term planning (OECD, 2023). In systems where institutional capacity is weak, informality, contribution losses and actuarial deficits occur more frequently (ILO, 2021). The strength of state capacity cannot be explained by the volume of fiscal resources alone; institutional quality, governance skill, strategic planning ability and the effectiveness of public administration are also decisive (Evans, 1995). Indeed, the principal reason why countries with similar fiscal indicators can produce different outcomes lies in differences in the quality of institutional management (Fukuyama, 2014). In systems where resources are used wastefully, supervision fails to function and long-term planning remains weak, the fiscal structure deteriorates more rapidly (North, 1990); countries with strong governance mechanisms, on the other hand, can remain more resilient despite similar demographic pressures (OECD, 2021). Raising contribution collection, reducing informality and strengthening actuarial planning are possible only with sound institutional infrastructures (ISSA, 2022). Future reforms should therefore set not only fiscal targets but also institutional transformation targets encompassing digitalisation, data management, risk analysis and performance-oriented management.

The fourth fundamental conclusion is that social security systems generate indirect yet powerful effects on foreign policy effectiveness. The traditional international relations literature mostly explains foreign policy capacity through military power, economic size or diplomatic activity (Morgenthau, 2005; Nye, 2011). This study demonstrates, however, that foreign policy effectiveness cannot be assessed independently of the components of domestic capacity. States under fiscal pressure are compelled to direct their resources predominantly towards domestic problems, and this narrows their room for manoeuvre in foreign policy (Zakaria, 1998). In countries where social security deficits place a lasting burden on the budget, the resources available for strategic investment shrink. Financially sustainable systems, by contrast, allow states to plan for the long term; a strong domestic structure also has a favourable effect on foreign policy decision-making processes (Rose, 1998). Countries with high domestic stability can approach international crises with greater preparedness, and governments with strong social legitimacy can pursue their foreign policy objectives with greater resolve (Rosanvallon, 2011). This finding is particularly meaningful for medium-sized and large states, since in an environment of geostrategic competition the reduction of domestic fragilities stands out as one of the principal factors enhancing foreign policy flexibility. Social security reforms thus affect not only social welfare but also the state's freedom of action within the international system; this observation constitutes one of the original contributions of the study.

The fifth fundamental conclusion is that social security systems should be counted among the elements of national power. Classical power analyses concentrate largely on military capability, economic size and technological advancement (Kennedy, 1987; Nye, 2004). Yet behind these elements there must

stand a strong social and institutional structure, and social security systems are among the essential components of that structure. A strengthened sense of economic security increases societal resilience (UNDP, 1994); societal resilience nourishes state capacity (Besley & Persson, 2009); and strong state capacity is able to produce more effective policies in the face of economic crises, security threats and international pressures (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The theoretical model of this research rests precisely on this causal chain. It is also observed that countries with strong and inclusive social protection systems are perceived more favourably by international public opinion and are able to develop more persuasive discourses in areas such as human rights, social justice and inclusive development; in this respect, success in social security can also be read as one of the elements supporting soft power capacity over the long run (Nye, 2004). Within this framework, viewing social security institutions merely as social assistance or pension agencies is an incomplete approach; future reforms need to be considered together with the perspectives of national power and geostrategic capacity. This assessment constitutes one of the principal foundations of the Geostrategic Social Security Theory developed in this study.

The sixth fundamental conclusion is that population ageing constitutes a serious challenge for social security systems but cannot, on its own, be regarded as a cause of crisis. The international examples examined show that an ageing population can be converted into economic and social value through the right policies (WHO, 2021). Longer lifespans, improving health conditions and the growth of the knowledge economy require the traditional assumptions about working life to be rethought (Harper, 2014). Numerous studies have established that chronological age and productive capacity do not always move in the same direction (Skirbekk, 2008). In fields requiring knowledge, expertise and experience, older age groups are seen to be capable of making significant contributions (Foster & Walker, 2015). The Strategic Active Ageing approach developed in this study proceeds from this body of evidence and treats older individuals not as passive beneficiaries but as potential sources of production and knowledge. The essence of this approach is not a crude extension of working time; it is the opening of the way for individuals to remain in working life for longer in a healthy, productive and voluntary manner. In this way, both the capital of experience can be preserved and the fiscal pressure on the social security system can be eased.

The seventh fundamental conclusion is that the future of pension systems cannot be reduced to the debate over raising the retirement age. International experience shows that successful reforms embody multidimensional approaches (Gruber & Wise, 2007). Changes to the retirement age can produce favourable results only when accompanied by improvements in health conditions, the strengthening of active ageing policies and the redesign of working environments (WHO, 2015). It is well documented that older age groups can continue to contribute, particularly in knowledge- and expertise-intensive sectors (Göbel & Zwick, 2012). As age advances, therefore, the nature of tasks should be changed and the physical burden reduced, while roles such as mentoring, training, consultancy, the transfer of institutional memory and strategic guidance should be brought to the fore. It is also observed that arrangements encouraging work at advanced ages are spreading in developed countries (OECD, 2019). The scenarios assessed within this framework indicate that, depending on circumstances and health

status, voluntary working models extending to age 70 for workers, 75 for civil servants and, in certain fields requiring high expertise, up to age 80 can be discussed under specific conditions. The success of such practices, however, depends on preserving individual freedom of choice, on lightening working conditions according to workload and seniority, and even on redesigning work for older employees in such a way that it is transformed almost into a hobby. In short, the pension systems of the future require a more flexible, more differentiated and more human-centred architecture.

The eighth fundamental conclusion is that there is a strong link between the level of pensions and social stability. One of the principal purposes of social security systems is to protect individuals against income losses in old age (Barr & Diamond, 2009). When this purpose is insufficiently fulfilled, trust in the system weakens; individuals who suffer severe welfare losses in retirement face growing economic and social fragility, and this fragility produces consequences at the societal level as well (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). It is known that reforms focused solely on cost reduction struggle to generate social support over the long run (Pierson, 2001). It is also problematic, from the standpoint of social justice, for individuals who have contributed regularly to the system for many years to suffer severe losses in their living standards in retirement (Barr & Diamond, 2008). For this reason, the study has foregrounded a welfare-oriented approach to social security. According to this approach, to the extent that the conditions of financial sustainability are met, the link between the pension and the highest wage earned over a sustained period of working life should be strengthened; subject to the condition that the highest wage has been received for a specified length of time, the goal of bringing pensions gradually closer to the range of 75 to 80 per cent of that wage should be evaluated in stages. For such a goal to be sustainable, the fiscal structure must be strengthened and every step must be taken in harmony with actuarial balances (Holzmann, 2013). The peace of mind and confidence that retirees whose welfare is preserved will radiate through society will, in turn, consolidate institutional trust, social cohesion and societal solidarity (Rothstein, 1998). In conclusion, welfare and sustainability are not alternatives to one another but mutually complementary goals; social security reforms must observe fiscal discipline together with the principle of a life worthy of human dignity.

The ninth fundamental conclusion is that informal employment continues to be one of the most critical structural problems facing social security systems. Informality does not merely reduce contribution revenues; it also erodes the justice and trust dimensions of the system (Alper, 2021). The disruption of the balance between those who contribute regularly to the system and those who make no contribution at all corrodes institutional trust. In developing countries, informal employment ranks among the principal causes of social security deficits (ILO, 2024). In economies with high informality, the balance between the number of active insured persons and the number of persons receiving pensions and benefits deteriorates more rapidly, placing continuous fiscal pressure on the system. The fight against informality cannot succeed through inspection alone; economic growth, rising employment, productivity gains and the strengthening of labour markets are also necessary (Disney, 2004). Digital tracking systems and inter-institutional data-sharing mechanisms are among the most effective instruments of this struggle. The joint application of employer incentives, digital contribution systems

and effective supervision will make it possible to reduce informality and to contribute directly to financial sustainability.

The tenth fundamental conclusion is that the position of women in the labour market is one of the decisive variables for the future of the system, yet reading this relationship solely through employment rates would remain incomplete. The relevant studies point to the importance of striking a balance between women's participation in economic life and the strengthening of the family structure (Buğra, 2019). It is known that family support during children's early developmental years produces long-term social consequences. In designing policies to increase women's employment, therefore, models that safeguard family integrity and child development — such as remote work, part-time work, home-based production and flexible working — should be evaluated alongside them (OECD, 2023). Arrangements that do not penalise temporary withdrawals from working life during childbirth and early childhood — withdrawals that may, where necessary, extend to between three and five years — and that protect these periods for the purposes of insured service will support both family policy and the long-term revenue base of social security. Healthy, well-educated and productive generations are the system's soundest guarantee over the long run (Bloom et al., 2018). Family policy and social security policy should therefore not be conceived independently of one another; holistic models that support women's roles in both family life and economic life together should be preferred.

The eleventh fundamental conclusion is that technology and digitalisation will play a decisive role in the future of the system. In recent years social security institutions in many countries have accelerated their digital transformation processes (ISSA, 2023). Big data analytics, artificial-intelligence-assisted risk assessment and digital tracking systems are delivering tangible gains in contribution collection, in the fight against informality and in detecting fictitious insurance registrations and irregular payments. Rising institutional efficiency strengthens the fiscal structure (OECD, 2023). Digital transformation is not, however, a purely technical process; the development of human resources, the renewal of institutional culture and the assurance of data security are equally important. As technological transformation renders institutions more transparent and accountable, citizens' trust will also grow. Prioritising digital transformation investments will therefore consolidate, over the long run, the bond between financial sustainability and institutional capacity.

The twelfth fundamental conclusion is that the relationship between social security and health policy is far stronger than commonly supposed. As the population ages, the impact of health expenditure on the system becomes visible; the spread of chronic diseases and the growing need for long-term care magnify the fiscal pressure (WHO, 2024). Countries that invest in preventive health policies are seen to obtain more sustainable outcomes over the long run. Healthy ageing programmes not only raise individuals' quality of life; they also prepare the ground for the voluntary extension of working life (WHO, 2021). Healthy individuals remain productive for longer, and this productivity is reflected favourably both in economic growth and in contribution revenues. Health and pension policies should therefore be designed together, as mutually complementary strategic fields.

The thirteenth fundamental conclusion is that social trust plays a central role in the success of the system. When people believe that the system to which they contribute will protect them in the future, they give stronger support to its institutions (Levi, 1998). In societies where institutional distrust grows, by contrast, the willingness to pay contributions and the degree of integration with the system weaken. There is a strong relationship between the transparency of institutions and citizens' trust (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). The open disclosure of revenues and expenditures, the effective supervision of fund management and the strengthening of accountability are practices that nourish both trust and financial sustainability. As trust rises, informality declines and voluntary compliance increases. In this respect, trust is the invisible yet most valuable capital of social security systems; reforms should be assessed not only through fiscal indicators but also through their effects on social trust.

The fourteenth fundamental conclusion is that the effect of social security systems on economic resilience is stronger than commonly assumed. In periods of economic crisis, countries with strong social protection mechanisms face lower social costs (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). The preservation of income security prevents the collapse of domestic demand and contains social unrest. The experience of global crises has demonstrated that social security systems act as a buffer against economic shocks, a function that became even more pronounced in the post-pandemic period (ILO, 2021). Economic resilience cannot be explained by fiscal reserves alone; societal solidarity and social security networks are also among its essential components (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). Viewing social security expenditure purely as a cost is therefore an incomplete approach; under certain conditions such expenditure has the character of strategic investment that safeguards economic stability.

The fifteenth fundamental conclusion is that investment in human capital occupies a central place in the future of the system. Education, skills development and lifelong learning policies directly affect the revenue base of the social security system (Becker, 1993). A more highly qualified workforce generates higher productivity and higher incomes, which in turn increase contribution revenues. Rising educational attainment reduces informality and strengthens the capacity to adapt to technological transformation. The new forms of work emerging alongside the digital economy have made the system's adaptive capacity more important than ever. Education policy should therefore not be conceived independently of social security reform; in particular, the development of the skills of the young population should be treated as a strategic investment in long-term financial sustainability.

The sixteenth fundamental conclusion is that social security must be handled in an integrated manner with national development strategies. For many years social security policy was assessed predominantly through the lens of cost; yet these systems are not merely items of expenditure (Barr, 2020). Strong social security mechanisms reduce economic uncertainty, make it easier for individuals to plan for the long term and produce favourable outcomes across a wide field extending from investment decisions to consumption behaviour. Economic growth nourishes social security, while strong social security systems contribute to development processes; the relationship runs in both directions. Furthermore, from the standpoint of adapting to changing demographic and economic

conditions, multi-pillar models that combine publicly based protection with complementary mechanisms are seen to offer advantages in the distribution of risk (Holzmann et al., 2012; World Bank, 1994). Whichever model is adopted, however, the essential function of social security — protecting individuals against risks such as old age, illness and the loss of working capacity — must not be impaired, and the balance between sustainability and the goals of social protection must be preserved (ILO, 2021). Assigning social security a more strategic position within development plans will make it easier to achieve economic and social objectives together.

The seventeenth fundamental conclusion is that the Geostrategic Social Security Theory developed in this study offers a serviceable explanatory framework for future research. Although the literature contains an extensive body of work on social security, the welfare state and pension systems, studies that directly address the relationship between social security and geostrategic power remain quite limited (Castles et al., 2010). This research is an attempt to fill that gap. In the model developed here, social security sustainability is situated within a holistic chain of relationships linking economic security, human security, societal resilience, institutional trust, state capacity, domestic stability, foreign policy effectiveness and geostrategic power. Reading the state capacity literature together with the social security literature has the potential to open new fields of research (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 2004). In a similar vein, the Strategic Active Ageing Model brings an alternative outlook that treats the increase in lifespan not merely as a fiscal burden but as an economic and social opportunity, and demonstrates that practices resting on the principle of voluntariness and differentiated according to the nature of working life can be discussed. Testing both models across different country cases and with quantitative datasets will allow their explanatory capacity to be established more clearly.

Proceeding from these conclusions, the recommendations addressed to policy-makers can be gathered into three-time horizons: the short, the medium and the long term. The common denominator of these recommendations is the fact that short-lived remedies — temporary budget transfers, periodic amnesty schemes and limited financing interventions — cannot eliminate structural problems (OECD, 2024). In the short term, priority should be given to steps that strengthen the revenue base of the system. The fight against informal employment should be conducted in an integrated fashion, combining digital contribution-tracking systems, inter-institutional data sharing, risk-based inspection and employer incentives that encourage registered employment. Raising contribution collection rates, restricting contribution amnesties and restructurings so that they do not weaken the system's deterrent force, and improving the balance between the number of active insured persons and the number of pension recipients are the concrete targets of this period. In addition, transparent reporting and effective internal audit mechanisms should be reinforced to ensure that institutional resources are used where they belong, and data analytics should be employed in preventing irregular payments and fictitious insurance registrations.

In the medium term, flexible and gradual retirement arrangements that smooth the transition between working life and retirement should be brought into operation. Regulations enabling individuals, once they have qualified for retirement, to remain in working life with a reduced workload, in part-time

positions or in consultancy-weighted roles will secure both the preservation of accumulated experience and the continuation of contribution revenues. Active ageing programmes should be designed together with their components of healthy ageing, workplace ergonomics, age-friendly working environments and lifelong learning (WHO, 2002). Flexible working models that raise women's employment while safeguarding family integrity should be extended, and mechanisms should be developed to protect, for the purposes of insured service, temporary withdrawals from work during childbirth and early childhood. Investment in preventive health services and in the management of chronic disease will, in the medium term, both restrain health expenditure and prepare the ground for the voluntary extension of working life.

In the long term, the gradual implementation of the Strategic Active Ageing Model and the Geostrategic Social Security Model developed in this study is recommended. Within this framework — and to the extent that health status and the nature of the occupation permit — voluntary working scenarios extending to age 70 for workers, 75 for civil servants and, in certain fields requiring high expertise, up to age 80 should be planned together with the following conditions: the lightening of the workload according to seniority, the redefinition of tasks with an emphasis on mentoring and guidance, and the redesign of the working environment so as to make it attractive to older employees. Transferring to working life competences that mature only over many years — experience, accumulated knowledge, the reflex for problem-solving and foresight — will strengthen both productivity and institutional memory. Likewise in the long term, and in step with the strengthening of the fiscal structure, a welfare-oriented target that reinforces the link between the pension and the highest wage received over a sustained period, bringing pensions gradually closer to the range of 75 to 80 per cent of that wage, should be tested against actuarial projections and then put into practice. These two goals nourish one another: the voluntary extension of working life increases the system's revenues, while the adequacy of pensions strengthens trust in the system and the willingness to contribute. Finally, social security should be treated as an inseparable heading of development plans and national security strategies, and reform decisions should be taken within a long-horizon institutional planning culture that is not confined to electoral cycles.

The common precondition of all the steps proposed here is that reforms be conducted on the basis of social legitimacy. It is known that reforms which fail to win the support of broad sections of society do not endure over the long run (Pierson, 2001). Because social security directly affects the lives of millions of people, reform processes should not be regarded merely as a matter of technical expertise; the participation of employees, retirees, employers and civil society organisations should be secured, and decisions should be shared transparently. Reforms conducted in a participatory manner and embraced by society encounter less resistance in implementation and prove more durable. The balance to be struck between technical rationality and social legitimacy is the fundamental factor that will determine the success of the reforms.

As with every academic study, this research too has certain limitations. The study is built largely on a theoretical and analytical framework; the model developed here needs to be tested empirically with

different datasets. Since social security systems vary considerably from country to country, the inferences drawn here may not hold to the same degree for every country. The course of demographic transformation, artificial intelligence, the digital economy and new forms of work may produce different outcomes in the future; the model should therefore be regarded as a dynamic structure and updated with new data. Future quantitative and comparative research can both test the model's explanatory capacity and bring to light further dimensions of the relationship between social security and geostrategic power. These limitations do not diminish the value of the study; on the contrary, they constitute the natural continuation of a study whose aim is less to reach a final verdict than to open a new research agenda.

In conclusion, social security systems occupy a central position in the twenty-first century's debates on strategic state capacity. The assessments set out throughout the study have shown that social security sustainability is not merely a matter of pensions or social assistance; it is a multidimensional structure affecting social welfare, economic resilience, institutional capacity and political stability. All of these elements play a decisive role in the state's freedom of action within the international system. Strong social security systems generate higher social trust, sounder state capacity and a more resilient domestic stability, and this accumulated strength nourishes foreign policy effectiveness and national power capacity. This approach — which can also be read as a contemporary interpretation of the maxim "let the people live so that the state may live" — places social security institutions among the essential components not only of the welfare state but also of strategic state-building. In the twenty-first century, therefore, social security policy will assume a critical role, beyond the preservation of welfare, in the construction of national resilience and strategic state capacity.

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Legislation

506 sayılı Sosyal Sigortalar Kanunu (mülga).

1479 sayılı Bağ-Kur Kanunu (mülga).

2925 sayılı Tarım İşçileri Sosyal Sigortalar Kanunu (mülga).

5434 sayılı Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Emekli Sandığı Kanunu.

5502 sayılı Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu Kanunu.

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