Narratives of Securitization: Media Portrayals of Refugees in Türkiye During Election Periods

Güvenlikleştirme Hikâyeleri: Türkiye'de Mültecilerin Seçim Dönemlerinde Medya Portreleri

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the portrayal of Syrian refugees in theTurkish media within the theoretical framework of securitization, focusing on the context of seven electoral periods between 2014 and 2023. Employing thematic analysis as its methodological approach, the research meticulously examines a dataset comprising 12,794 newspaper articles to explore how the narratives surrounding Syrian refugees have been shaped and influenced by the political climate of elections in Türkiye. The analysis aims to uncover the extent to which Syrian refugees are securitized in media discourse, identifying variations in the intensity and nature of coverage across different types of elections and among various media outlets, including both state-run and private newspapers. The findings reveal that 21% of the media coverage categorizes Syrian refugees under criminal themes, with a significant emphasis on "smuggling" and "caught" sub-themes. This securitization of refugees varies significantly during electoral periods, suggesting a strategic use of media narratives to influence public opinion and potentially affect electoral outcomes. The study highlights a dynamic interplay between media representations of refugees and the electoral cycle, with private media (Habertürk & Hürriyet) outlets showing a more pronounced fluctuation in coverage compared to state-run media (TRT). This research contributes to the discourse on the media securitization of refugees by providing empirical insights into the politicization of refugee issues during critical political junctures. It underscores the pivotal role of the media in shaping societal perceptions and dialogues about refugees, thereby informing both public discourse and policymaking. The findings of this study highlight the need for a critical examination of the social and political implications of media practices. Additionally, they argue for a journalistic approach that accurately reflects the complexity of the refugee experiences and operates with a sense of responsibility.

Keywords: Securitization, Syrian Refugees, Turkish Elections, Thematic Analysis, Media Representation

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, güvenlikleştirme teorik çerçevesi içinde Suriyeli mültecilerin Türk medyasındaki portresini incelemekte olup, 2014 ile 2023 arasındaki yedi seçim dönemi bağlamına odaklanmaktadır. Yöntem olarak tematik analiz kullanılarak yapılan araştırma, 12,794 gazete makalesinden oluşan bir veri setini inceleyerek Suriyeli mültecilere ilişkin hikâyelerin Türkiye'deki siyasi iklim tarafından nasıl şekillendirildiğini ve etkilendiğini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Analiz, Suriyeli mültecilerin medya söyleminde ne ölçüde sekuritize edildiğini ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflerken, farklı seçim türleri ve farklı medya kuruluşları arasında kapsamın yoğunluğunda ve doğasındaki farklılıkları belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bulgular, medya kapsamının %21'inin Suriyeli mültecileri suç teması altında kategorize ettiğini, "kaçakçılık" ve "yakalandı" alt temaları üzerinde önemli bir vurgu yaptığını ortaya koymaktadır. Mültecilerin güvenlikleştirilmesi seçim dönemlerinde önemli ölçüde değişmektedir ve bu da medya hikâyelerinin kamuoyunu etkilemek ve muhtemelen seçim sonuçlarını etkilemek için stratejik bir şekilde kullanıldığını öne sürmektedir. Bu çalışma, özel medya kuruluşları olan Habertürk ve Hürriyet'in, devlet kanalı TRT'ye kıyasla haber kapsamlarında daha belirgin dalgalanmalar sergilediğini göstermektedir. Bu araştırma, kritik siyasi dönemlerde mülteci konularının siyasallaştırılmasıyla ilgili deneysel bir bakış açısı sunarak, mültecilerin medya güvenlikleştirmesi konusundaki tartışmaya katkıda bulunmaktadır. Toplumsal algılar ve mülteciler hakkındaki diyalogları şekillendirmede medyanın temel rolünü vurgulayarak, hem kamuoyu tartışmalarını hem de politika yapımını bilgilendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, medya uygulamalarının toplumsal ve siyasi etkilerinin eleştirel bir şekilde incelenmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca, mülteci deneyimlerinin karmaşıklığını doğru yansıtan ve sorumluluk bilinciyle hareket eden bir gazetecilik yaklaşımının önemini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güvenlikleştirme, Suriyeli Mülteciler, Türkiye Seçimleri, Tematik Analiz, Media Temsili

Introduction

In the contemporary political landscape, the intricate interplay between security and identity has become a focal point of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of refugee movements. The ever-evolving security paradigm, as expounded by the Securitization Theory, sheds light on how issues are framed as existential threats, thereby influencing the public discourse and policy responses. This is true in the case of Turkish political dynamics, where the plight of Syrian refugees has emerged as a critical area of concern.

As waves of Syrian refugees reshape geopolitical realities, their fluid identities intersect with the broader discourse of security. Understanding the dynamic nature of identities and the securitization process becomes paramount to understanding the multifaceted challenges that unfold. This article delves into the nexus between the securitized Turkish political landscape and the representation of Syrian refugees, with a particular focus on the role played by the media.

In the Turkish context, media portrayal during election periods adds a layer of complexity, in which political narratives intertwine with the securitization of refugees. This article aims to dissect the intricate relationship between media representation and the securitization of Syrian refugees within the unique framework of Turkish politics.

Thus in this article, it is accepted that media transmission is a powerful tool of manipulation. Addressing media perceptions will help us to understand their impact on the identity of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. This ability was analyzed by the three major news sources in Türkiye—TRT, HABERTÜRK, and HÜRRİYET—regarding their news about Syrian refugees between 2014 and 2023, using the key "Syrian" for the analysis.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, this article situates itself within the existing scholarship on security, identity, and media studies. The methodology section outlines the approach taken in this research, including data collection, corpus formation, detailed coding procedures, and the integration of advanced data processing techniques. The temporal framework and political context provide the necessary backdrop for understanding the evolving dynamics of media discourse around Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

In the methodology and conclusions section, which analyze the study's data, the hypotheses and analytical framework aim to provide detailed insights into the complex relationship between media, security, and refugee representation. In the conclusion, this article synthesizes the findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the media actively participates in shaping the securitization of Syrian refugees, thereby influencing public opinion and political trajectories in the Turkish context.

Turkish Electoral System

This section provides a brief overview of Türkiye's electoral systems and election processes to help readers better understand the analysis, particularly in the context of specific election periods in Türkiye.

Election periods in Türkiye are typically characterized by competition among political parties as well as debates on economic, social, and foreign policy issues. Factors such as voter expectations, government performance, economic conditions, and foreign relations are crucial elements that influence election outcomes. Therefore, election processes in countries with a dense political culture like Türkiye are considered significant periods for analysis.

This study, we focuses on examining the attitudes of three major news channels, especially during election periods. However, in order to better understand this analysis, it would be beneficial to briefly touch upon the electoral system in Türkiye. The electoral system in Türkiye is based on the 1982 Constitution and encompasses different procedures for different elections.

In general elections (parliamentary elections), the proportional representation system used for the Turkish Grand National Assembly allows voters to cast their votes for parties or independent candidates in their constituencies. Following a constitutional amendment in 2018, the president is directly elected by popular vote in presidential elections, and the proportional representation system is also affected in local elections.

These electoral systems aim to ensure democratic participation in Türkiye and the effective representation of political parties. Therefore, considering the political atmosphere during election periods and the impact of the electoral system will contribute to understanding how media coverage of Syrian refugees is influenced, especially during election seasons.

The Relationship Between Security and Identity

The concept of security is fundamentally defined as the state of being free from danger and threats. However, this concept has been subject to different definitions and perceptions throughout history due to the evolution of structures. In the context of the international system, the duo of state and sovereignty is unified under the umbrella of security. The notion of security, established on taking precautions in case of danger and transitioning to a state of defense/protection, encompasses various interrelated elements such as the state, society, strategic position, geographical features, cultural structure, and economic conditions. The shaping of the concept of security around these elements has led to different interpretations of this phenomenon throughout history. During the two world wars, when the perception of sovereign states was dominant, the concept of security was approached from a realist perspective within the framework of military threats and measures. However, in the post-Cold War era, with the increasingly active role of international actors and individuals within the system, security has shifted from the military domain to the societal domain. With this transition, the situation of threat and/

or danger faced not only by the state but also by societies and, especially by individuals required security measures by states (Çıtak, 2020). In today's international system, various security phenomena such as refugee security, environmental security, food security, cultural security, and identity security can be identified.

The primary reason for changing perceptions of security is the ability of individuals to undergo a construction process. As individuals come together to form societies, the cultural structure or identities they possess can alter the perception of security by states. To fundamentally understand the relationship between identity and security, it is necessary to look at the definition of identity, but to narrow down the scope of the study, it would be more accurate to define identity as social identity.

Social identity is a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling of strong attachment to a group and group characteristics that form an individual's identity. An important point in the acceptance of social identities is that there is always a need for an "other" for an identity to be accepted. In order for an individual or a group of people to form their own identity, they need to be aware of the ways in which they are different from others. Over time, this awareness is perceived as an element of threat between oneself and the other/opposite and actually turns into an element of security. At this point, refugees who fall outside the social identity definition of a state and are categorized as "the other" actually cause the formation of a new social identity in the country to which they migrate. This leads to a second identity being perceived as a danger or threat in the country hosting the refugees. The main reason for this is that the elements of "common identity" that Ole Waever proposes, such as culture, religion, language and race, are seen as threatened. According to Waever, migration is therefore seen as one of the most important threats (Waever, 2008). In this context, security and identity are considered as two concepts that are in constant interaction with each other.

This study examines the approach towards Syrian refugees in Türkiye, who have been positioned as the "other" due to the intense wave of migration triggered by the Syrian Civil War since 2011. It also explores how this situation is perceived as a security or identity issue within the country.

Under the Scope of the Evolving Security Paradigm: Securitization Theory

In the post-Cold War international era, the Copenhagen School, under the guidance of influential figures such as Barry Buzan, O. Wæver and J. Wilde played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse on security. Their significant contributions, epitomized by the securitization theory, not only defied conventional state-centric security models but also offered a sophisticated framework for comprehending and addressing complex challenges, particularly those related to the plight of refugees.

Securitization theory emphasized that security concerns could be effectively managed not only through the articulation of threats, but also through collaborative efforts aimed at building a security community. It has been demonstrated that tensions and military reflexes in Europe can be overcome not only by talking about security, but also by developing cooperation and fostering an environment where peace can be maintained and potential aggressors can be deterred without resorting to military means (Waever, 2011). This approach has broadened security to cover a broad spectrum that includes not only political, economic, social and environmental dimensions.

In the context of refugees, the securitization theory takes on added significance. The Aberystwyth School's perspective, integrated into the broader Copenhagen School framework, sheds light on the challenges of framing refugee issues in the language of security. Framing refugee movements in terms of security, as highlighted by the Aberystwyth School, can impede the formation of constructive political and social relationships with those seeking refuge by portraying them as "dangerous foreigners." (Çıtak, 2020, p.23).

The Copenhagen School, however, advocates for a more inclusive and cooperative approach, steering away from securitizing refugee concerns in a manner that fosters division and perpetuates stereotypes.

Furthermore, the Copenhagen School's securitization theory acknowledges the regional specificity of security issues. It posits that a total security perception is unattainable, and that security areas should be delineated based on regional contexts. When applied to refugee movements, this perspective recognizes that the risks and threats associated with displacement may differ across regions, demanding tailored approaches that consider the unique challenges each region faces.

The securitization process, as outlined by the Copenhagen School, involves a political actor framing a threat through discourse transforming into a security problem, and convincing the target audience of its urgency. This holds significant implications for refugees, as the construction of refugees as a security threat influences public perceptions and policy responses. Therefore, the Copenhagen School's securitization theory encourages a more careful and responsible framing of refugee issues to avoid exacerbating tensions and facilitate cooperative solutions (Asderaki and Markozani, 2021).

Expanding security beyond traditional military concerns, the Copenhagen School also recognizes the role of non-state actors in shaping security dynamics. This comprehensive perspective underscores the need to address the multifaceted nature of security challenges, including those associated with refugee movements.

In conclusion, the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, when applied to refugee issues, advocates for a cooperative and inclusive approach, steering away from securitizing the discourse around displacement. By recognizing the regional specificity of security concerns and the role of non-state actors, the school

provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing the complexities of refugee-related challenges within the broader context of international security.

Fluid Identities of Syrian Refugees

The term "Syrian refugees" is deliberately used in this study because it is widely accepted in both public and academic discourse, providing clarity of meaning. Although the legally correct term is "Syrians under temporary protection," its limited recognition may hinder the comprehensibility of the text. In Türkiye, the legal status of Syrian refugees is governed by the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014), which grants Syrians access to basic services and temporary residency but does not equate to full refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention (Kirişci, 2014). Since the study examines media discourse, aligning the terminology with common usage in both media and literature enhances the coherence of the analysis. Additionally, the familiarity of the term "Syrian refugees" among readers strengthens the narrative and facilitates quicker understanding. Therefore, this widely accepted term was deliberately chosen for the sake of clarity and effectiveness.

In the context of security studies, when examining the application of securitization theory to the case of Syrian refugees, it becomes evident that Türkiye has approached the issue from a securitization perspective, reflecting broader shifts in security paradigms in the 21st century.

The Syrian Civil War, which has been ongoing since 2011, has led to a significant influx of Syrian refugees, affecting not only the individuals directly involved but also the global community. Within the framework of securitization theory, which posits that the portrayal of certain groups as security threats legitimizes extraordinary state measures (Buzan and Wæver, 1998), the role of the media emerges as crucial in shaping public perceptions of Syrian refugees. The branding of refugees as threats to society forms the basis for state security policies and fuels public anxieties (Allen, 2016). This

aligns with the concept of "fluid identity," which refers to an identity that can be defined variably, and is often influenced by media portrayals. Media coverage frequently homogenizes Syrian refugees, presenting them as a monolithic group, thus reinforcing stereotypes and negative biases (Çıtak, 2020). This oversimplification contributes to a distorted, fluid identity that overlooks individual diversity and nuances within the refugee population.

Media narratives play a dual role in shaping public perception and influencing policy, often blurring the lines between humanitarian representation and securitization. Research indicates that emotional manipulation, a tool used by media to direct viewer responses, is common. By emphasizing dramatic stories and powerful images, media can amplify perceived threats and steer public perceptions to view Syrian refugees as security risks (Qadri, 2020). This emotional framing can distort facts, leading to perceptions that are more emotionally than rationally grounded. As Banks (2012) and Chouliaraki and Stolić (2017) observed, such portrayals can incite fear and reinforce "the politics of fear," which affects both public sentiment and policymaking.

Ideological influences also shape media representation, by embedding political, cultural, or social perspectives in narratives. This can result in coverage that aligns with specific political agendas, portraying refugees in a way that heightens security concerns and shapes state policy. The distinction between state-run and private media further underscores these ideological biases, with state-run outlets such as TRT often showing controlled peaks in coverage during politically significant periods, while private outlets such as Hürriyet display more pronounced fluctuations (Blinder & Allen, 2016).

The dehumanization of refugees in media narratives is another critical aspect of securitization. Dehumanization involves the denial of human attributes and the portrayal of groups as less than fully human, often through massification,

separation, and passivity (Haslam, 2006; Martikainen & Sakki, 2021). For instance, portraying refugees as faceless, anonymous masses reinforces their identity as a homogeneous threat (Banks, 2012). Such visual strategies, including the depiction of refugees as being controlled security forces or behind borders, contribute to the perceptions of refugees as invaders or threats to national stability (Hansen et al., 2021). These depictions align with research showing that negative portrayals foster public fear and support for restrictive measures (Furedi, 2007).

However, even humanitarian narratives that may evoke empathy, are not without complications. They can maintain power imbalances by portraying refugees as passive, infantilized victims dependent on aid (Chouliaraki & Stolić, 2017; Ryan & Tonkiss, 2023). This reinforces a hierarchical relationship between the host society and the refugee, perpetuating an "us versus them" dichotomy. The emotional atmosphere created by media coverage, while potentially fostering empathy, can also heighten societal anxieties when combined with security narratives (Qadri, 2020).

Ultimately, these media strategies create a fluid identity for Syrian refugees, in which they are variably framed as threats, victims, or objects of humanitarian concern, often dictated by the political or ideological leanings of the media outlet (Çıtak, 2020; Blinder & Allen, 2016). This fluctuating identity can have significant implications for public policy and social integration, influencing both how refugees are perceived by the host society and how they view themselves (Kteilly, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016).

This analysis underscores the need for critical examination of media practices to foster a more balanced and ethical portrayal of refugees. As media narratives play a powerful role in shaping public perceptions, they must strive to represent the complexity of refugee experiences without reinforcing harmful stereotypes or contributing to securitization and dehumanization.

Syrian Refugees in the Media: Portrayals and Electoral Influence

Media is a significant tool in shaping social conflict and cohesion. Research shows that media can contribute to enhancing understanding between groups, but it can also fuel the spread of hatred (van Dijk, 1991). Especially on ethnic issues, media discourses may promote polarization between 'us' and 'them,' fostering conflict rather than cohesion (Hall, 1997). Moreover, it is widely discussed that media representations influence the identity perceptions of migrants and refugees. Specifically, when media discourses portray migrants and refugees as the 'other,' it can increase feelings of distrust and hostility in society (Esses, Medianu and Lawson, 2013). The narratives of the European media on the refugee crisis illustrate how representations of refugees are framed and how these frames affect public perceptions (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017). It also visual media can accelerate the dehumanization of refugees, deepening its negative impacts (Bleiker, et al., 2013).

The media plays a critical role in the securitization process by framing the refugee issue as a security concern and significantly influencing public understanding and political responses. In an effort to evoke emotional responses through stories, images and headlines, the credibility of media representations of Syrian refugees is often questioned (Narlı and Özaşçılar, 2021). Perceptions of identity shaped by the media's modes of representation, use of language and coverage of events add to the complexity of the issue.

Media portrayal of Syrian refugees often focuses on dramatic stories designed to evoke deep emotional responses, which can distort reality and lead to credibility issues. Limited to emergencies or sensationalized events, these representations may inadequately reflect the real situation. Credibility concerns are compounded by the media's efforts to influence audiences through language and imagery, sometimes distorting facts or presenting exaggerated stories (Taş, et al., 2022).

The media also explores issues of social acceptance and resistance by linking Syrian refugees to local perspectives, presenting various attitudes within society. Integration and success stories play an important role, offering viewers a positive perspective on Syrian refugees' efforts to assimilate and contribute to local communities (Georgiou, 2017).

It is possible to categorize the above-mentioned perspectives on the representation of refugees in the media. Victimization involves the representation of refugees as merely pitiful and in need of help. Depoliticization refers to the presentation of the refugee problem as a purely humanitarian crisis, ignoring its political dimension. Dehumanization involves portraying refugees as unfeeling beings devoid of human dignity. Marginalization refers to the portrayal of refugees as outsiders, marginalized and insignificant. Homogenization involves perceiving refugees as a uniform group and ignoring their individual differences. De-individualization involves ignoring refugees' individual identities and treating them as a general category (Pandır, 2020). These representations can contribute to prejudice and xenophobia by stigmatizing refugees as the "other" in society.

Discourses and public perceptions of Syrians in Türkiye are shaped by a variety of factors and are often influenced by the media, political leaders, different segments of society and other stakeholders. In particular, the concepts of "guest" or "brother", emphasized in official Turkish government statements, focus on Syrians being considered temporary and seen as brothers and sisters in need of urgent humanitarian assistance (Pandır, M., 2020). Within this framework, Syrians are often defined as victims of war and perceived as individuals in need of urgent assistance. However, there are divergent views on social cohesion and acceptance, with some arguing that Syrians should be integrated and accepted into Turkish society, while others see their presence in Türkiye as a threat and view it negatively. These discourses and perceptions constitute an important topic of debate and evaluation, affecting the integration

and social acceptance of Syrians in Türkiye and potential conflicts (Asderaki and Markozani, 2021). The representations and discourses of the media and other stakeholders on this issue can affect the social cohesion process by shaping the general social perception.

Especially recently, the issue of Syrian refugees has become a major political issue in Türkiye. News reports on Syrian refugees are often aligned with specific news channels and political affiliations, raising questions about the objectivity of these portrayals. The methodology section later in the study will delve deeper into these dynamics.

When we examine the role of the media during election periods, it is clear that the media plays a key role in shaping public opinion. As a tool in the democratic process, the media informs voters about candidates' political views, policies and backgrounds. However, the media's influence may not always be positive, as biased reporting or sensationalism may hinder the dissemination of objective information.

Especially for Syrian refugees during election periods, media coverage can influence the political agenda and encourage politicians to engage with the refugee crisis and formulate policies. The tone of refugee news can shape public perception and influence voters' attitudes. Candidates can strategically use the refugee issue to create emotional impact or make promises on refugee policies (Erdoğan, et al., 2017). Moreover, refugee news can have an impact on policymaking between candidates discussing various solutions to the crisis in order to attract voter attention.

The complex interplay between media representation of Syrian refugees and electoral dynamics emphasizes the need for the media to provide objective, accurate and diverse information. By avoiding emotional manipulation and presenting a realistic perspective, the media can contribute to more credible and fair representation, promote positive public perceptions and influence voter behavior.

A Synthesis of Scholarly Perspectives

The literature review systematically examines existing research on the role of media in shaping public perceptions of refugees and their securitization. This body of work categorically falls into three main areas: studies leveraging securitization theory to dissect media narratives, research employing framing methodology to scrutinize refugee coverage, and investigations focused on the dynamic and fluid identity of refugees within media discourse. Notably, a critical gap is identified in the literature regarding the specific influence of media narratives in the Turkish electoral landscape on the securitization process of refugees and their evolving identities. While current studies broadly outline the impact of political and social dynamics on the portrayal of refugees, there remains an urgent need for targeted research exploring the nuanced effects of Türkiye's political climate and electoral processes on refugee securitization.

Theoretical contributions to securitization underscore how political entities and media frameworks construct refugees as national security threats. Nonetheless, the literature signals a scarcity of explorations into how electoral mechanisms influence this securitization narrative and the role media plays in molding the fluid identities of refugees. "Unmasking Deviance: The Visual Construction of Asylum Seekers and Refugees" (Banks, 2012) provides a seminal framework, arguing that English national newspapers depict asylum seekers and refugees through a deviant and perilous lens, thus catalyzing their societal stigmatization. Employing a qualitative visual analysis, this study critically examines the imagery in newspaper articles about asylum seekers and refugees, demonstrating how these visual narratives reinforce adverse stereotypes and perceptions by emphasizing the 'otherness' and deviance of these groups. The analysis uncovers a consistent portrayal across various publications, revealing distinct "visual scenarios" that exacerbate negative stereotypes and contribute to the stigmatization of asylum seekers and refugees.

In addition, "Grammar, Context, and Power: Securitization of the 2010 Belgrade Pride Parade" (Ejdus and Božović, 2017) adopts Securitization Theory alongside a mixed-methods approach of content and discourse analysis to delve into the securitizing tactics deployed in the aftermath of the event. The findings indicate that these strategies were only marginally successful, largely due to their inadequate integration into a broader discursive framework and the limited influence of the actors involved. This study underscores the importance of a sociological perspective in comprehending the securitization processes, suggesting that a deeper understanding of the interplay between discourse, power, and identity is crucial.

(Watson, 2011) bridges the theoretical gap between securitization and framing approaches, acknowledging their overlapping domains yet critiquing the limitations posed by their distinct epistemological and methodological orientations. Proposing a collaborative division of labor, Watson advocates for an integrated methodological approach to study the construction of threats in security studies, identifying key areas where insights from framing analysis could enrich securitization research, notably in understanding audience reception, the role of non-linguistic forms of communication, and the mechanisms of marginalization and empowerment.

Further expanding on the discourse, (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017) and (Hellmueller and Zhang, 2019) explore the media's role during the refugee crisis, emphasizing the pivotal role of media narratives in shaping public perception and the significant impact of iconic imagery on media framing. These studies highlight the necessity for media narratives to more accurately represent refugees' voices and experiences, advocating for a shift towards more inclusive and representative media practices.

This literature review not only maps the terrain of existing research on the media's influence on refugee securitization but also illuminates the

profound need for further inquiry into the specific context of the Turkish electoral landscape. It calls for interdisciplinary research approaches that combine political science, media studies, and sociology to offer a more nuanced understanding of how media narratives, influenced by political climates and electoral processes, contribute to the construction of refugee identities and their perception as security threats. Additionally, the review underscores the potential of alternative media and digital platforms in diversifying the discourse around refugees, suggesting pathways for future research that could challenge prevailing narratives and contribute to more balanced and humane representations.

The critical examination of existing literature underscores the pivotal role of media narratives in the securitization of refugees, revealing a nuanced interplay between political discourse, media framing, and societal perceptions. Despite the rich theoretical insights and methodological rigor demonstrated in the reviewed studies, a notable gap persists in the comprehensive understanding of these dynamics within specific socio-political contexts, such as Türkiye's electoral landscape. This review not only highlights the necessity for further empirical research in this area but also calls for an innovative methodological approach that transcends traditional media analysis. Incorporating digital ethnography and big data analytics could offer unprecedented insights into the real-time dynamics of media narratives and public opinion, especially in the age of social media and online news consumption. Furthermore, adopting an interdisciplinary lens that integrates political science, sociology, and media studies could enrich our understanding of the securitization process, offering a more holistic view of the complex factors that shape the portrayal and perception of refugees. By bridging these methodological and disciplinary gaps, future research can illuminate the intricate mechanisms through which media narratives contribute to the securitization of refugees, thereby informing more nuanced policy responses and fostering a more empathetic public discourse.

Methodology

This study employs a multifaceted methodological approach designed to investigate the intricacies of media coverage on Syrian refugees within the Turkish electoral landscape. Recognizing the complexity of media narratives and their impact on public perception, the research is anchored in a comprehensive thematic analysis grounded in an inductive approach. This allows for an exploratory examination of media content, free from the constraints of pre-established categories, enabling the organic emergence of themes directly from the data.

Research Questions: To guide this analysis, the following research questions were posed:

1- How are Syrian refugees portrayed in the Turkish media during electoral periods between 2014 and 2023?

2- To what extent does media coverage of Syrian refugees reflect securitization themes, and how do these vary across different election types and media outlets?

3- What are the differences in media representation between state-run (e.g., TRT) and private newspapers (e.g., Habertürk, Hürriyet) in terms of their thematic focus on Syrian refugees?

These research questions aim to frame the study's exploration of how political contexts influence media narratives and the implications for public perception and policy discourse.

Data Collection and Corpus Formation

For the collection of data, an initial review was conducted of the most widely read papers in Türkiye. Following this review, websites that are accessible online, with archives that are easily accessible to the public, were given priority. In this context, the websites of Hürriyet newspaper, Habertürk newspaper, and the TRT news site were identified as suitable sources for data collection. The keyword "Syrian" was used for data gathering. The collected data were stored in an Excel file, and the news headlines were categorized into specific sub-themes for thematic analysis. These

categories were identified as major themes of victimization, politics, criminality, demographics, social integration, economy, and discrimination. Within the major theme of criminality, sub-categories such as crime, robbery, illegal activities, drugs, prostitution, violence/fight, suspect, caught by, terrorism, arrested, theft/burglary, murder, gang activities, explosion, smuggling, and imprisonment were examined.

The foundation of our analysis is an extensive corpus of 12,794 news articles, representing a wide spectrum of media outputs concerning Syrian refugees. This dataset was meticulously compiled from a range of sources, ensuring a diverse and representative sample of the media landscape. The collection process involved a systematic search and retrieval of articles, spanning from mainstream to niche publications, to encapsulate varied perspectives on the subject matter.

Detailed Coding Procedures

To ensure the integrity and reliability of our thematic analysis, we implemented a rigorous double-coding system. Each article within the corpus underwent a thorough review by two independent coders, trained in qualitative analysis techniques to identify, extract, and categorize themes with precision. This dual-coding process not only served to minimize potential bias but also facilitated a cross-validation of thematic categorizations, enhancing the robustness of our findings.

To further refine our analysis, each article was initially sorted based on its headline, providing an early indication of thematic relevance. This preliminary sorting was instrumental in identifying dominant narratives and recurring motifs related to the securitization of Syrian refugees. Keywords, serving as minor thematic indicators, played a crucial role in this process. These were not arbitrary but carefully selected for their ability to encapsulate the essence of the articles, aiding in the effective grouping and analysis of the corpus.

Visualization and Quantitative Analysis

Upon establishing thematic groups, the study transitioned into a visualization phase, employing a variety of graphical tools to represent our findings visually. Bar charts, pie charts, and other graphical representations were utilized to translate the quantitative data into accessible and interpretable formats. This phase was crucial for presenting the data in a manner that was not only comprehensible but also engaging, allowing for a clearer depiction of thematic frequencies and distributions across different media outlets.

Temporal Framework and Political Context

A distinctive feature of our methodology is the incorporation of a temporal framework that aligns with key election years in Türkiye. By strategically selecting periods significant to Türkiye's political narrative, the study examines the fluctuation of media narratives in relation to the electoral cycle. This temporal analysis is critical for understanding how political contexts influence media portrayals of Syrian refugees, offering insights into the timing and intensity of securitization themes.

Advanced Data Processing Techniques

In tackling the voluminous dataset, advanced data processing techniques were employed, utilizing Microsoft Excel for its robust analytical capabilities. This involved a detailed process of categorization and thematic sorting, supported by the use of macros and complex formulas for efficiency and accuracy. The double-coding system was complemented by consistency checks and inter-coder reliability assessments, ensuring the methodological rigor of the thematic analysis.

Hypothesis Testing and Analytical Framework

The study is anchored by a set of foundational hypotheses that aim to dissect the dimensions of securitization within media narratives, particularly in the representation of Syrian refugees across various media platforms and throughout differing electoral periods in Türkiye. These hypotheses serve as the analytical framework, steering the investigation towards a deeper comprehension

of the intricacies inherent in securitization as depicted in the media during times of political significance.

It is posited that thematic analysis will reveal a spectrum of securitization degrees, distinctly characterized across different minor themes and newspapers. Specifically, the research anticipates an escalation in the media's securitization focus on Syrian refugees during electoral periods, a reflection of the intensified political climate's influence on media narratives. Additionally, the portrayal of securitization is expected to oscillate with the changing phases of the election cycle, illustrating the fluidity of political dynamics.

The study also projects a divergence in the patterns of securitization between state-operated media, such as TRT, and private entities like Hürriyet and Habertürk, attributing this to their unique editorial policies and the potential impact of political influences. Moreover, there is an expectation that private newspapers might engage in more sensationalized securitization themes compared to state-run media, possibly as a tactic to engage and maintain audience interest within a competitive media landscape.
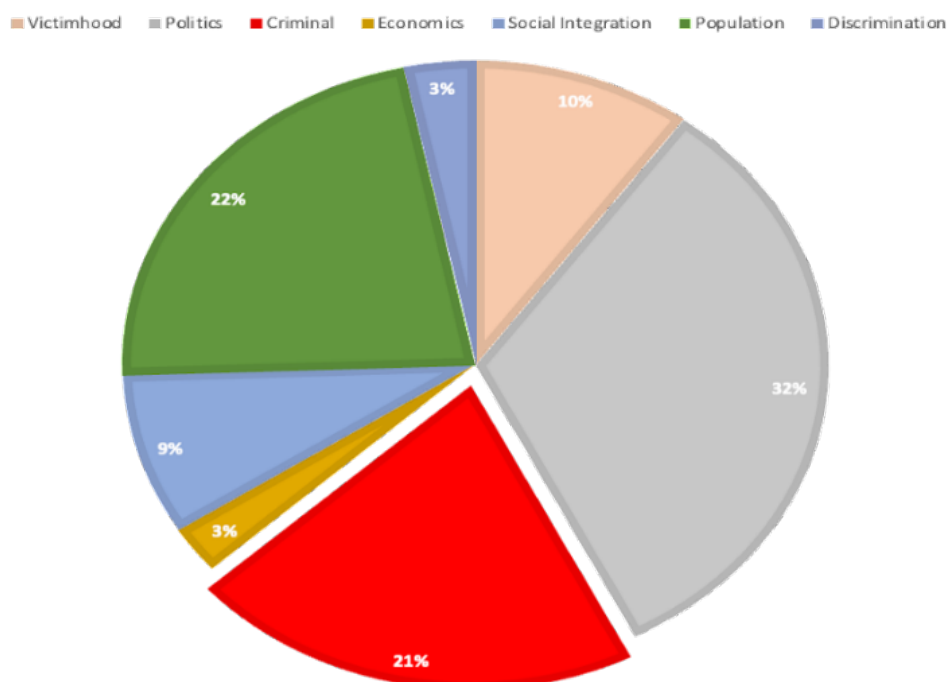
By blending a meticulous thematic analysis with an acute understanding of the political milieu, the study propels forward our understanding of the media's sway over public perceptions during pivotal electoral intervals. The methodologies applied herein not only pave the way for this research but also open new corridors for future scholarly inquiry into the complex nexus of media narratives, political context, and social perception.

Results of the Study

The comprehensive analysis of 12,794 newspaper articles within the dataset has yielded significant insights into the portrayal of Syrian refugees across varying media landscapes, particularly in the context of criminality. This detailed examination, constituting 21% of the news (as seen below) corpus under the Criminal category, situates this theme as the third most prevalent, unveiling a complex narrative interplay within the Turkish media ecosystem.

Figure 1

Major Theme Comparison

Legend: Victimhood, Politics, Criminal, Economics, Social Integration, Population, Discrimination

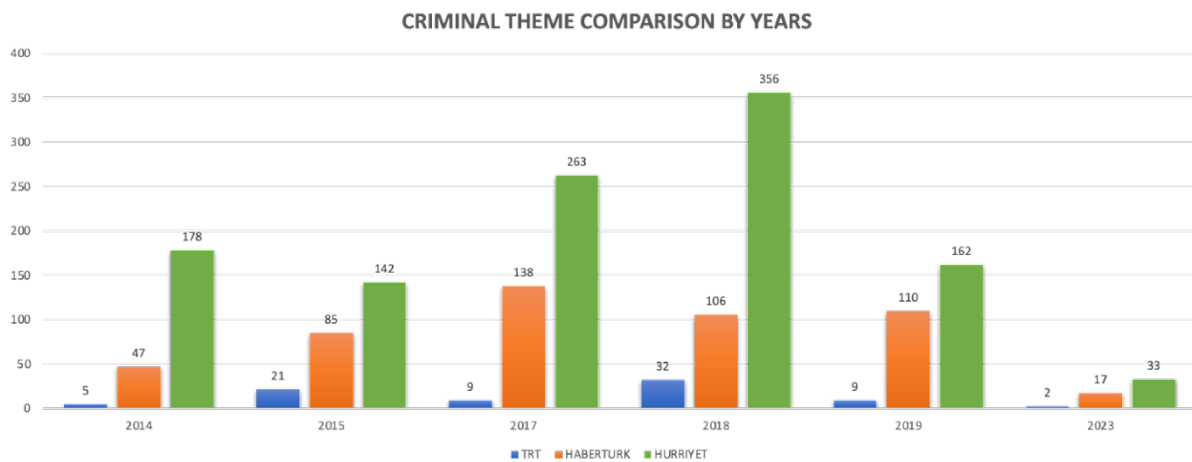Values shown: 3%, 22%, 10%, 32%, 21%, 3%, 9%

Hürriyet emerges as the publication with the most extensive coverage of Syrians, juxtaposed against TRT, the state-operated channel, which exhibits the minimal focus on such narratives. A temporal peak in the criminal portrayal by Hürriyet was observed in 2018, a trend paralleled by TRT, albeit with subsequent decline. Conversely, Habertürk's peak in criminal-themed coverage was in 2017, followed by a notable reduction. However, 2019 saw a divergence in trends, with Hürriyet's coverage diminishing significantly, whereas Habertürk experienced an uptick in comparison to the preceding year.

Delving deeper into the electoral timeline, segmented into four distinct periods for each election year (as seen below), reveals nuanced media behaviors. Notably, Hürriyet's coverage of criminal news associated with Syrian refugees diminishes during local elections but surges in anticipation of general elections, only to wane subsequently. This pattern starkly contrasts with the coverage strategy during the repeated 2015 election, where criminal news was conspicuously absent. Habertürk mirrors Hürriyet's general election pattern, albeit with less pronounced fluctuations. TRT's coverage strategy diverges,

Figure 2
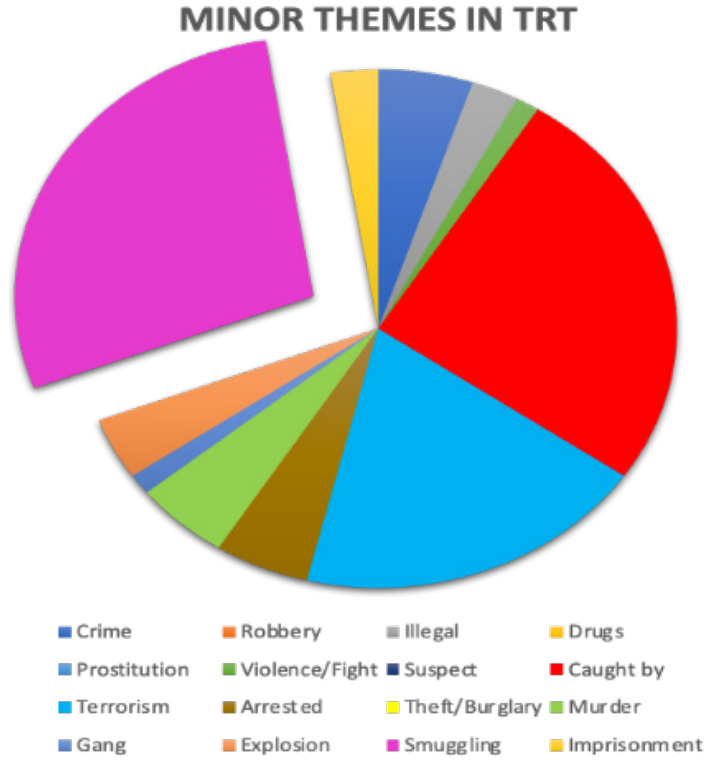
Criminal Theme Comparison By Years

The temporal scope of data collection spans critical electoral junctures in Türkiye, aiming to discern the potential fluctuations in media narratives contingent upon the election type and media outlet. Between 2014 and 2019, Türkiye witnessed a series of electoral events, including local elections, general elections, and a pivotal referendum in 2017. The peculiar repetition of the June 2015 general election in November 2015 underscores the political dynamism of the period under study. Initial observations suggest a generalized pattern of election-related coverage across these electoral milestones, with Hürriyet deviating from this trend during the 2018 general elections. Without a granular year-by-year dissection, attributing variations to the type of election remains speculative.
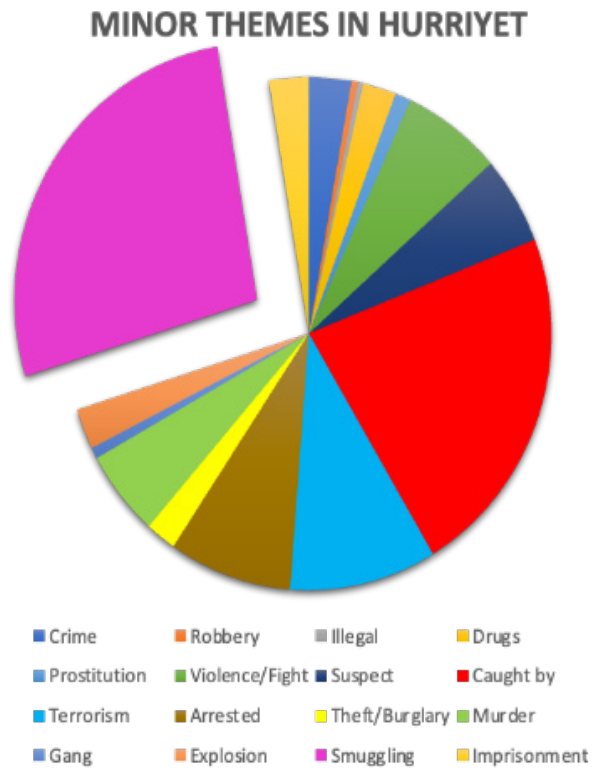
characterized by minimal to no criminal news pre-general elections, escalating during the election period. In the context of local elections, TRT's coverage trajectory inversely mirrors that of other publications, with an increase preceding the elections and a subsequent decline.

Sub-theme analysis within the Criminal Category further elucidates media focus. Both TRT and Hürriyet predominantly feature "smuggling" as a critical narrative (as seen below), whereas "caught" emerges as the dominant theme in Habertürk (as seen below). Notably, TRT abstains from covering themes such as robbery, prostitution, drugs, suspicion, and theft entirely.
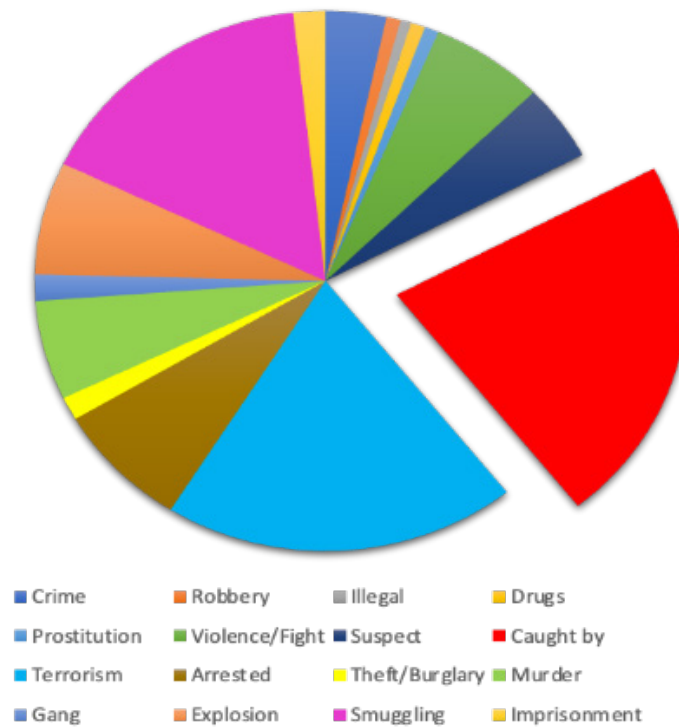
Figure 4

Minor Themes in TRT

Figure 5

Minor Themes in Hürriyet

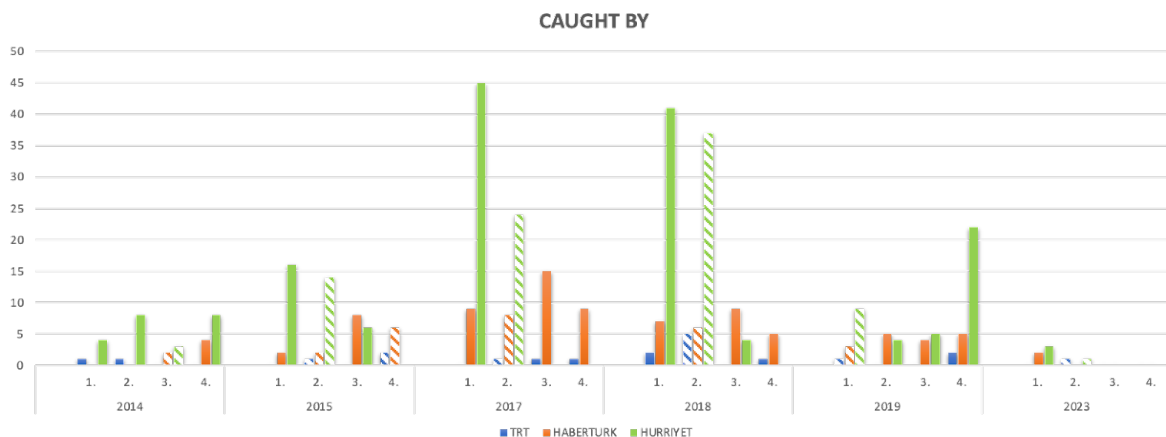Narratives of Securitization: Media Portrayals of Refugees in Türkiye During Election Periods ▪ Canan ÇETİN · Melike GÜRELLİ

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Figure 6

Minor Themes in Habertürk

MINOR THEMES IN HABERTURK

Legend:
- ■ Crime
- ■ Robbery
- ■ Illegal
- ■ Drugs
- ■ Prostitution
- ■ Violence/Fight
- ■ Suspect
- ■ Caught by
- ■ Terrorism
- ■ Arrested
- ■ Theft/Burglary
- ■ Murder
- ■ Gang
- ■ Explosion
- ■ Smuggling
- ■ Imprisonment

The "caught" sub-theme displays varying trends across media outlets. TRT shows an uptick in such coverage during general elections, a pattern echoed by Habertürk, albeit with a subsequent post-election increase. Hürriyet follows a similar trajectory. However, local elections do not exhibit a clear pattern for this sub-theme across the analyzed newspapers.

Election periods, particularly in 2015 and 2018, mark a surge in smuggling-related coverage by TRT, a trend not mirrored during local elections. Habertürk's pattern for smuggling news remains ambiguous for general elections but sees a significant rise during local elections. Hürriyet exhibits heightened smuggling news coverage preceding general elections, which diminishes during the elections and escalates during local elections.
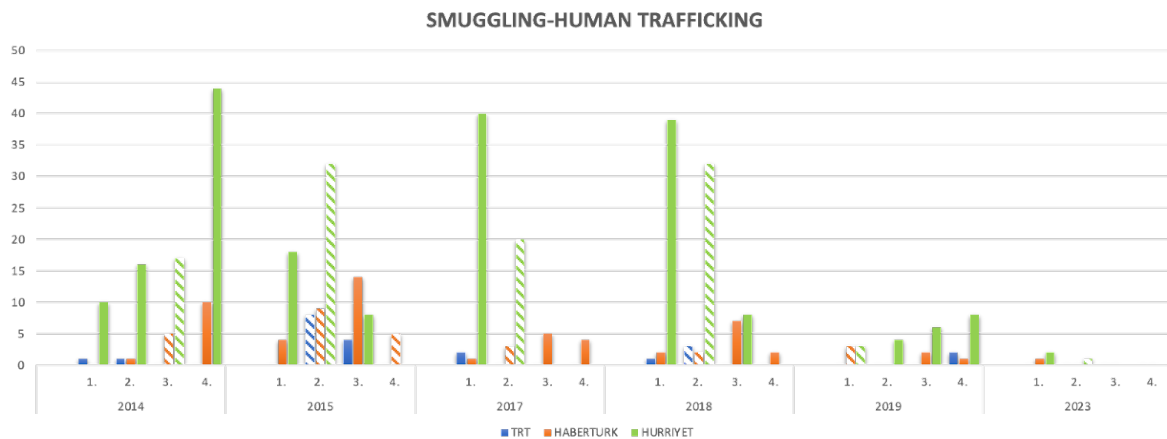
Figure 7

Caught By Theme

CAUGHT BY

Legend: ■ TRT ■ HABERTURK ■ HURRIYET

Figure 8

Smuggling-Human Trafficking

This nuanced thematic analysis across minor themes and newspapers underscores the significant portion of criminal news related to Syrian refugees within media coverage. The emphasis on "smuggling" by Hürriyet and TRT, contrasted with Habertürk's focus on the "caught" theme, supports the hypothesis that media coverage varies across different minor themes and newspapers. Each outlet selectively emphasizes specific aspects of securitization in their reporting, reflecting distinct editorial choices and potentially divergent audience engagements.

The study's findings reveal a pronounced increase in criminal-themed articles during election periods, particularly evident in TRT's coverage. This aligns with the hypothesis anticipating an escalation in the securitization of Syrian refugees in media narratives amid elections, attributed to the intensified political climate and media's pivotal role in shaping public discourse. The observed variation in securitization themes across different election phases, especially the pre- and post-election coverage by Hürriyet, corroborates the changing political dynamics and media's responsive strategies, validating the hypothesis.

Moreover, the distinct patterns between state-run and private media, with TRT showcasing a marked increase in criminal news during election periods, contrast with private outlets like Hürriyet, which broke its general election pattern in 2018. This divergence supports the hypothesis that state-run media may exhibit different securitization patterns compared to private newspapers, potentially influenced by editorial policies and political directives.

While the study illuminates the securitization themes within media coverage, particularly during election periods, it stops short of conclusively determining the sensationalization of securitization in private newspapers compared to state-run media. The post-2018 decrease in Hürriyet's coverage might hint at prior sensationalism; however, a deeper qualitative analysis of article content, framing, and language is requisite to substantiate such claims fully.

In summary, the intricate analysis of media narratives surrounding Syrian refugees, especially within the criminal category, reveals a complex interplay of thematic emphasis, editorial strategies, and political contexts. This multifaceted portrayal is influenced by the electoral landscape, underscoring the media's significant role in navigating and shaping public perceptions of security and criminality among refugee populations.

Conclusion

The thematic analysis of Syrian refugee media coverage underscores the critical role of securitization in shaping public discourse, especially through a media focus on criminal themes. The finding that 21% of the analyzed

content frames refugees within the context of crime highlights how securitization narratives permeate the portrayal of marginalized groups. The media's recurrent emphasis on terms such as "smuggling" and "caught" reflects a selective narrative that aligns with the core tenets of securitization theory, as articulated by Buzan and Wæver (1998). Their framework suggests that by framing specific groups as existential threats, these groups can be perceived as security concerns, justifying restrictive or exclusionary policies.

This study's findings resonate with broader academic discussions on media's dual role as both a reflector and shaper of public sentiment. The disparity between private and state-run media coverage, with private outlets like Hürriyet showing fluctuating patterns responsive to electoral cycles and TRT maintaining more controlled peaks, indicates that media outlets do not function solely as conveyors of neutral information but as agents influenced by political and market pressures. This dual role may contribute to reinforcing an "us versus them" narrative, where refugees are depicted as threats, potentially exacerbating social divisions and fueling xenophobic sentiments.

The relationship between media narratives and political motives is particularly evident during election periods. This study shows how media coverage becomes a strategic tool for political elites, leveraging narratives around refugees to galvanize voter bases. The cyclical portrayal of Syrian refugees as security risks can shape public opinion and influence policy debates, aligning with findings from previous studies on media's role in amplifying societal anxieties (e.g., Wodak, 2015; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). The variation in themes, such as the prevalence of "smuggling" in TRT's coverage versus Habertürk's emphasis on "caught," suggests nuanced editorial strategies that cater to different political or audience-driven goals.

Reflections on the Hypotheses
The hypotheses posited at the outset of this study have been largely supported by the findings. There

is a clear indication that media coverage of Syrian refugees increases in securitization themes during election periods, with variations in the intensity and focus of such coverage across different types of elections and media outlets. The study also reveals that state-run media exhibit different patterns of securitization coverage compared to private media, potentially reflecting differing editorial policies and political influences.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research
While the study offers significant insights, it is not without limitations. The reliance on quantitative content analysis provides a broad overview of trends but may overlook the subtleties of language, framing, and narrative construction that qualitative analysis could reveal. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative analyses to unpack the complexities of media narratives and their impact on public perceptions more deeply.

Additionally, exploring the perspectives of the journalists and editors responsible for the coverage of Syrian refugees could provide valuable insights into the decision-making processes behind media representations. Further studies could also examine the effects of these media narratives on public attitudes towards refugees, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-political dynamics at play.

Policy Implications and Media Practice
The study's findings highlight the need for responsible media practices that acknowledge the impact of securitization narratives on societal attitudes towards refugees. Media practitioners and policymakers alike should be cognizant of the power of media representations in shaping public discourse and policy. There is a critical need for ethical guidelines that encourage balanced and nuanced reporting, particularly in contexts where political tensions may influence media narratives.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how Turkish media portrays Syrian refugees within the context of criminality

and securitization, particularly during election periods. By illuminating the variations in media coverage and the implications of such narratives, the research underscores the significance of media representations in influencing public discourse and policy on refugees. It calls for a balanced approach to reporting, one that transcends sensationalism and politicization to foster a more informed and empathetic public discourse regarding the complex realities faced by refugees.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Suriye İç Savaşı nedeniyle 2011 yılından itibaren Türkiye'ye gelen Suriyeli mültecilerin medya temsillerini, 2014-2023 yılları arasındaki yedi seçim dönemi boyunca güvenlikleştirme teorisi çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Güvenlikleştirme, toplumun belirli grupları tehdit olarak algılamasını sağlama amacı taşıyan bir söylem inşası olarak tanımlanır ve medya bu söylemi geniş kitlelere ulaştırmada merkezi bir rol oynamaktadır. Türkiye'de Suriyeli mültecilerin siyasi söylemlerle nasıl güvenlikleştirildiğini ortaya koyan bu çalışma, seçim dönemlerinde medyanın mülteci temsillerini analiz ederek kamuoyunu nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır.

Çalışma, Türkiye'nin en büyük medya kuruluşları arasında yer alan TRT, Hürriyet ve Habertürk'te yayımlanmış 12.794 haber makalesini tematik analiz yöntemi ile incelemiştir. Bu yöntem, seçim dönemleri boyunca Suriyeli mültecilerin medya temsilinde hangi temaların öne çıktığını anlamak için yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın başlangıç kısmında Türkiye'de mültecilere dair güvenlik ve kimlik kavramlarının nasıl şekillendiği anlatılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda güvenlikleştirme teorisinin Türkiye'ye özgü bir çerçevede incelenmesi gerektiği

vurgulanmıştır. Seçim dönemi politikalarında, mültecilerin toplum için tehdit olarak tanımlanmasıyla seçmenlerin güvenlik kaygılarının arttırılabileceği, medya söylemleri üzerinden bu kaygıların sürekli pekiştirildiği gözlenmiştir.

Çalışmanın yöntemi, medya içeriklerinin güvenlik temelli söylemlerle şekillenip şekillenmediğini anlamaya yöneliktir. Çalışmada, özellikle suç, sosyal entegrasyon, ekonomi ve ayrımcılık gibi ana temalar altında haberlerin nasıl ele alındığına odaklanılmaktadır. Seçim dönemlerinde bu temaların daha sık gündeme gelmesi ve güvenlikleştirici bir dile sahip olması, çalışmanın önemli bulguları arasında yer almaktadır. Bu amaçla, araştırmada her bir seçim dönemi farklı medya organlarının Suriyeli mülteciler hakkında hangi söylemleri kullandığı ve hangi temaları ön plana çıkardığı detaylı olarak incelenmiştir. Özellikle TRT gibi devlet destekli bir medya kuruluşu ile özel medya kuruluşları olan Hürriyet ve Habertürk arasında dikkate değer farklılıklar olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

Medya kuruluşları tarafından mültecilerin seçim dönemlerinde "suçlu" veya "tehlikeli" olarak tanımlanma oranlarında ciddi bir artış gözlenmiştir. Örneğin, çalışma kapsamında incelenen haberlerin %21'i suç temasını içermektedir ve bu oran seçim dönemlerinde %25'e kadar çıkmaktadır. Bu haberlerde "kaçakçılık," "yasadışı giriş," ve "yakalandı" gibi alt temaların yoğun olarak kullanıldığı görülmektedir. Özellikle Hürriyet ve Habertürk gibi özel medya kuruluşlarında bu tür söylemler seçim dönemlerinde dikkat çekici şekilde artmaktadır. Hürriyet'in 2018 genel seçimlerinde Suriyeli mültecilere dair suç temalı haberlerde %15 oranında artış yaşadığı, Habertürk'ün ise aynı dönemde benzer içeriklerde %10 oranında bir artış gösterdiği tespit edilmiştir. TRT ise güvenlikleştirme söylemlerini daha sınırlı bir çerçevede ele almakta ve devlet politikasına paralel olarak daha kontrollü bir dil kullanmaktadır. Özel medyanın güvenlikleştirici söylemleri daha yoğun kullandığını gösteren bu fark, medyanın siyasi ve toplumsal olaylara olan duyarlılığının, politik iklimle doğrudan ilişkilendirilebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. TRT'nin, devlet politikalarına uygun olarak daha kontrollü ve eşitlikçi bir dil kullanırken, özel medya kuruluşlarının daha agresif bir güvenlikleştirme söylemi benimsediği görülmektedir.

Bu güvenlikleştirici söylemler, toplumda Suriyeli mültecilere karşı olumsuz bir algı oluşturmakta ve mültecilerin toplumdaki "öteki" olarak konumlandırılmasına yol açmaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları, seçim dönemlerinde mültecilerin medya söylemleri aracılığıyla "tehdit" olarak tanımlandığını ve bu temaların özellikle özel medya kuruluşlarında ticari ve siyasi çıkarlar doğrultusunda daha fazla kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durum, seçmenlerin mültecilere karşı güvenlik kaygılarını arttırarak toplumun belirli bir bölümü üzerinde olumsuz bir etki yaratmaktadır. Özellikle seçim kampanyalarında bu tür güvenlik temalarının kullanılmasının, Suriyeli mültecilerin toplumda olumsuz bir imgeyle özdeşleştirilmesine katkıda bulunduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Seçim dönemlerinde mültecilere dair olumsuz söylemlerin artmasının seçmen algısı ve kamuoyunun mültecilere yönelik tutumları üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olduğu gözlemlenmiştir.

Çalışmanın yöntem bölümünde bu analizlerin nasıl yapıldığı detaylandırılmaktadır. Veri toplama aşamasında, mültecilerle ilgili olarak Hürriyet, TRT ve Habertürk gibi haber sitelerinde "Suriyeli" anahtar kelimesi kullanılarak haberler derlenmiş ve toplanan haberler başlıklar ve içerik temaları açısından sınıflandırılmıştır. Kodlama sürecinde, "suç," "ekonomi," "sosyal entegrasyon" ve "ayrımcılık" gibi ana temalar belirlenmiş ve haberler bu temalar altında kategorize edilmiştir. Özellikle suç teması altında "kaçakçılık," "yakalandı," ve "sınır ihlali" gibi alt kategoriler oluşturulmuş ve her bir medya kuruluşunun bu konuları ele alış biçimleri karşılaştırılmıştır. İki farklı kodlayıcı tarafından yapılan çift kodlama süreci, analizdeki öznelliği en aza indirmek için uygulanmıştır. Bu aşamada ayrıca TRT gibi devlet destekli medya kuruluşları ile özel medya organlarının güvenlikleştirme temalarını nasıl ele aldığı arasında farklılıklar incelenmiştir.

Seçim dönemlerinde artan güvenlikleştirme söylemlerinin, kamuoyunda mültecilere dair olumsuz tutumları güçlendirdiği ve mülteci konusunun seçim kampanyalarında daha kolay bir manipülasyon aracına dönüştürüldüğü anlaşılmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, medya aracılığıyla yaratılan güvenlikleştirme söylemlerinin kamuoyunu ve mültecilere dair algıları derinden etkileyebileceğini göstermekte ve medya söylemlerinin seçmen davranışları üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, medyanın mültecilerle ilgili söylemlerini daha dengeli ve sorumlu bir çerçevede ele alması gerektiğini vurgulayarak, kamuoyunda daha sağduyulu ve insancıl bir bakış açısının gelişmesine katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Medyanın seçim dönemlerinde güvenlikleştirme temalarını arttırarak toplumda bir "biz" ve "onlar" ayrımı yaratması, mültecilerin daha insanî bir yaklaşımla temsil edilmesi gerekliliğini işaret etmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, çalışmanın sonuçları, medya aracılığıyla güvenlikleştirilen mülteci temsillerinin seçim dönemlerinde toplumun algısını nasıl etkilediğine dair önemli bulgular sunmaktadır. Bu bulgular, medya ve politika yapıcıların, mülteci temsillerini toplumsal barışı ve entegrasyonu destekleyecek bir çerçevede ele almasının önemini vurgulamaktadır.

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Çıkar Çatışması
Conflict of Interest
Herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır. None