



# Turkish Newspapers Wildfire Coverage During the Summer of 2021

## Türkiye Medyasının 2021 Yazı Yangınlarını Haberleştirmesi

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### Öz

*Bu makalede yangınlar ve afetlerle ilgili medya araştırmalarında yaygın olarak ileri sürülen bazı varsayımlar, Türkiye'deki 2021 yangınlarının farklı siyasi görüşten gazetelerde nasıl çerçvelendiği incelenerek sınanacaktır. Bu çerçevede ele alınacak en temel varsayım yangın gibi afetler haberleştirilirken, iklim değişikliğinin bu afetleri şiddetlendiren etkisinden bahsedilmemesidir. Medya kuruluşları, afetleri iklim değişikliği gibi küresel olaylarla ilişkilendirmeden kendi coğrafi ve ulusal konularının ve güç ilişkilerinin merceğinden değerlendirirler. Türkiye'de medya, mevcut siyasal ve toplumsal çatışmalarının çerçevesinden yangınları haberleştirmiştir. Bu durum da iklim değişikliği konusunda önlemler almaya, azaltım ya da uyum politikaları yürürlüğe koymaya yönelik çözüm önerileri sunmak yerine gazeteleri daha çok yangın söndürme, afet sonrası müdahale tartışmaları ile 'son dakika' gelişmeleri odaklı haberler yapmaya itmiştir. Araştırmada çerçeve analizi yöntemi kullanarak gazetelerin yangın haberlerini verirken hangi çerçeveleri ve siyasal toplumsal aktörleri ön plana çıkardıkları incelenmiştir. Sonraki aşamada, haberlerin çerçevelerinin yangınların nedenini teşhis etmeye (diagnostic) ya da yangınla mücadele ve iklim değişikliğine uyum politikalarına dair çözüm üretmeye (prognostic) odaklı olup olmadıkları değerlendirilmiştir. En yüksek oranda çözüm üreten yayın haberlerinin %14,2'sinde çözüm önerilerine yer vermiştir. Siyasi görüşlerinden bağımsız olarak örneklemdeki bütün gazeteler genellikle toparlanma/iyileşme sürecine dair çözümler önermişlerdir, proactive -önleyici- iklim uyum politikaları önerileri içermemektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yangın, İklim Değişikliği, Afet, Risk Haberciliği, İklim Politikası Çerçevelemesi

### ABSTRACT

*In this article, some of the assumptions commonly put forward in media research about wildfires and disasters will be examined by exploring how the 2021 fires in Turkey were framed in newspapers with differing editorial and political views. Within the scope of this reporting, the discussion will centre on how these reports of fires, omitted any mention of climate change and its impact on these disasters. Media organizations evaluate disasters through the lens of their geographical and national positions as well as power relations, without associating them with global events such as climate change. The media in Turkey covered the fires within the framework of their current political and social conflicts. This situation has seen newspapers deliver news focused on extinguishing fires, post-disaster response discussions and 'last minute' developments, instead of offering solutions on climate change and the implementation of mitigation or adaptation policies. In this research, through the use of frame analysis method, the approaches and the actors that newspapers represented while covering wildfires are analyzed. In the next phase, news frames are studied whether they are oriented to reveal the causes of the wildfires (diagnostic) or to propose solutions (prognostic) regarding firefighting or climate adaptation policies. The publication which provides most solutions, referred to solutions in 14,2% of all its news. Regardless of their political views all newspapers in the sample generally proposed solutions regarding the recovery process rather than proactive or preventative climate adaptation policies.*

**Keywords:** Wildfire, Climate Change, Disaster, Risk Journalism, Climate Policy Framing

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## INTRODUCTION:

During the summer of 2021, wildfires took hold in several countries across the world. Studies pointed to a strong link between the increase in the number of hot days and wildfires globally (IPCC, August 9, 2021), particularly in the Mediterranean region (Türkeş, 2019). CAMS Global Fire Assimilation System (GFAS) noted that in the Mediterranean region, the worst fire was seen in Turkey (Eke, M., Cingiroglu, F., and Kaynak, 2022). In Turkey, nearly 180 ha of forestland was lost, an increase in that reported for previous years, where the average annual loss was 20-40 ha prior to 2021 (Yeşil Düşünce, 2022). Fire counts also rose significantly in Antalya and Muğla (respectively 695 and 385) compared to the average of the previous five years (not more than 165 for both cities) and resulted in significant levels of air pollution (Turkey (Eke, M., Cingiroglu, F., and Kaynak, 2022).

As scientists noted in the IPCC SREX (2012) report, climate change risk management lies at the heart of the solution. According to this approach, emergency and risk management issues should be planned with the participation of all stakeholders, drawing on a proactive approach to disaster risk reduction or adaptation and the building of resilience in relation to climate change (Kadioğlu, 2011; 129). In times of disaster, the media generally fails to both reveal the underlying scientific causes of the disaster and to make necessary suggestions to policy makers. In fact, there is a focus on national power relations and the quest for a scapegoat, which may lead to a simple criticism of political figures, without any proposals of proactive policy actions (Hovardas 2014; Karyotakis 2022). It may also result in the stigmatization of some social groups in times of disaster. Studies on the role of the media and journalists in relation to risk management note that the debate on climate change is shifting away from national perspectives. The aim is to put forward concrete policy measures and to call on journalists to adopt a wider brief in relation to the issue (Volkmer and Sharif 2018). However, the coverage of the disasters rarely highlights the systemic or political problems that result in communities being exposed to these disasters (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012).

Recent research covering a four-month period before and after the wildfires (Uzunoğlu and Karaca, 2021) showed that in the period covering forest fires, West Black Sea floods and COP 26, there was increased media coverage of the climate crisis. According to this study, based on generic media frames, which can be adapted to any topic (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000), the responsibility frame (48.5%), which considers both the ability to deal with and responsibility for solving a problem, was to the fore in all media outlets independent of their ideology. However, the frame analysis method (Entman, 1993) when restricted to generic frames may be unsatisfactory for understanding the shortcomings of a specific climate policy or forest management, and for covering the different views of diverse stakeholders on this specific issue.

Therefore, by focusing solely on the coverage of fires in three politically different print and online news media, this study aims first to analyze issue-specific frames (De Vreese and Lecheler 2016) related to forest fires and their link to climate change. Issue-specific framing refers to specific topics and salient events debated in the public sphere in relation to the study's theme (De Vreese and Lecheler 2016). For instance, the emergence of news framings such as "firefighting governance" or "arson" becomes possible only if the study looks to identify framings specific to forest fires and not to climate change in general. In order to define the specific news framing that the media could adopt during wildfires, this study will first define the problems common to global media outlets. It will describe the political context and media structure within which the 2021 wildfires were covered by different newspapers. This approach enables the risks and measures specific to forest fires to be identified and for specific media framing and policy suggestions to be proposed. Based on the prognostic (solution-oriented) and diagnostic (cause-oriented) framings (Benford and Snow, 2000) the study seeks to determine why the systemic relation between wildfires and climate change is not investigated and why the presentation of solutions is limited. Finally, it will discuss the results of the frame analysis in order to draft a roadmap for the coverage of wildfires in a time marked by climate crisis.

## 1. Media Framing of Wildfires

The relationship between wildfires, drought, heat waves and climate change was first debated in the late 1990s, mainly in the U.S, where wildfires and fire management problems were already a critical issue. Studies on the media's wildfire coverage in different countries show that the reference to the relationship between wildfires and climate change has been missing in the news or mentioned only as secondary concerns after policy and fire management considerations (Morehouse and Sonnett, 2010; Öhman et al., 2016). Although some recent studies of 37 English language media indicate an increase in attention in the media in relation to climate change issues between 2013 and 2018, (Hopke, 2020), references to climate change are generally seen in media outlets, which have climate-specialist reporters.

While covering wildfires, media focuses on “what is happening now” and on the current impact of the disaster on people and the environment (Houston et al., 2012). The cause of the wildfire and how the disaster is presented, also called diagnostic framing (Benford and Snow, 2000), are given prominence compared to solution-based, prognostic framings (Benford and Snow, 2000). In times of disaster, media tends to cover the issue episodically (Iyengar, 1990), isolating it from the scientific context, in this case climate change, and possible policy solutions (Crow et al., 2016). When solutions are presented in news stories, they likely focus on the recovery of physical structures and health (Walkera et al.2020; Morehouse and Sonnett, 2010) or, at best, on risk management or adaptation rather than mitigation policies (Öhman et al., 2016).

Furthermore, social conflicts and the political context of the countries were seen to affect the coverage of wildfires or disasters in general by the media, and engender discriminatory or in some cases racist discourse in relation to the victims or with regard to possible offenders. For instance, studies on the coverage of Hurricane Katrina revealed that the media's news stories had depicted black victims negatively (Voorhees et al, 2007; Haider-Markel et al., 2007). They showed that news in relation to looting by black evacuees, as well as rape and murder, had been exaggerated or was fake (Gavin, 2008). Another form of discrimination while covering the victims of disasters is to present them as passive and/or weak actors. During the 2015 wildfires in Canada, indigenous communities and women (Walkera et al., 2020) were portrayed using disempowering media frames that served to consolidate or reaffirm conventional national or male-dominated views of such communities by institutions. This was also apparent during the 2014 wildfires in Sweden in relation to the portrayal of both women and rural communities (Öhman et al., 2016). Another aspect of this process of defining affected people concerns the climate justice framing of the disaster. Roosavall (2017) claims that climate justice framing does not only involve people affected by a disaster, but also all stakeholders including authorities with the capacity to shape both policies and relevant organizations. Therefore, climate justice framing is strictly connected with the notion of responsibility.

The coverage of foreign wildfires and their links to climate change rarely draw the media's attention, when the country is exposed to a similar experience recently (Berglez and Lidskog, 2017). Additionally, in times of disasters, mainstream media may construct narratives within their own national context and attribute responsibility to political and social actors according to the national power structure. Furthermore, in politically polarized countries or before elections, wildfires are covered as a political issue and their environmental causes and impact are underrated (Hovardas 2014; Karyotakis 2022). This framing tends to strengthen the role of national institutions rather than stimulating sensibilities on global issues (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen & Cottle, 2012) such as climate change or/and suggesting better disaster management policies. Pantti et al. (2012) note that this approach, which is linked to national contexts, promotes the use of banal nationalism in the language of journalism.

In Turkey, current studies on the media's disaster coverage (Tekeli-Yeşil, Kaya and Tanner, 2019) support the findings of global research and show that newspapers focus on “what is happening at the time and the impact of the disaster more than on mitigation policies”. Recently, scholars (Yıldırım

and Yılmaz, 2019) interested in foreign wildfires - Attica - in terms of disaster management underlined the role of the media in this process. Few studies analyze the media's coverage of extreme weather events and their connection with climate change. In the same vein, with respect to the global media, these studies' findings showed that Turkish mainstream newspapers covered foreign wildfires (Australia in 2019 - 72% coverage) without linking them to climate change (Şahin, 2020). There is also a significant report on the 2021 Bozkurt flood, which was the biggest flood disaster in Turkey's history (Doruk, 2021). This report emphasizes climate justice and underlines the importance of understanding the needs of local people before and after a disaster in order to make them more resilient to future similar events.

## 2. Political Context and Media Structure

Low levels of newspaper circulation, the polarization of public broadcasting, a tradition of advocacy reporting (Elmas & Kurban 2011) and political parallelism (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz 2010) have shaped Turkey's news media. Political parallelism, which is characteristic of the Mediterranean media model (Hallin and Mancini 2004) and the pro-government media, have gained strength during the last decade (Yeşil 2016). Political control over media outlets and distribution networks is a high risk (Media Ownership Monitor, 2022) and Turkey's freedom of speech rank is 149 out of 180 countries (RSF, 2022). The social media law that came into force in October 2020 provides the government with significant powers to control digital media content. It forces major news websites and platforms to store user data in Turkey and assign a local representative to manage content removal requests (BBC, 8 June 2021). In June 2022, Turkey blocked access to VOA's and DW's Turkish language content as both broadcasters refused to apply for licences that would let the government increase its control over these outlets (Reuters, 1 July 2022).

Scholars consider there to be an inextricable link between neoliberal authoritarian systems and the degradation of the environment, as in the case of Turkey, the country's economy is heavily reliant on both the construction and energy sectors (Yeşil, 2016; Tansel 2018; Adaman, Arsel and Akbulut 2019). Since media companies are subsidiaries of these large conglomerates, which have significant investments in the energy sector, it is difficult for journalists, who work in the mainstream media to criticize the rent-seeking mega projects in these sectors. These companies have facilities also in forestlands and negligence in relation to their operations or in relation to the maintenance of their facilities may be dangerous.

In such a professional milieu, climate change mainly draws the attention of journalists when disasters occur and those working in mainstream newspapers are not specialists with respect to climate change governance (Şahin and Uzelgün, 2016). Budget issues also make it difficult for journalists to produce original content on climate news and in their news on global disasters generally they have to use images from the international news agencies (Şahin and Uzelgün 2016; Uzunoglu and Karaca, 2021).

Otherwise, politicians and mainstream media in Turkey adopt a discourse similar to that seen in other developing countries, which while accepting human induced (anthropogenic) climate change as a fact, argues that it is the responsibility of developed countries to tackle it and not that of developing countries (Uzelgün and Castro, 2015). However, since media ownership in Turkey is concentrated in the hands of the energy sector, unlike other developing countries, the discourse of the pro-government and mainstream media on climate change gives evidence of its own particular characteristics - these can be categorized as economic rationalist or sustainability discourses (Baykal Fide, 2022) as defined by Dryzek (1997). Thus, although climate change is not a controversial issue, forest fires and their relationship to climate change as well as their governance may be treated differently by pro-government and opposition media.

### 3. Forestland Governance in Turkey and the Causes of the 2021 Wildfires

Turkey's forests, which are located in the Mediterranean region, are affected by wildfires and according to scientists will continue to be affected in the coming years. According to data from the General Directorate of Forestry (OGM, 2020); in the 10-year period between 2012 and 2021, 5.3% of forest fires were started intentionally (arson), 34.62% by negligence and accident, 11.9% by natural causes and 48.2% by unknown causes. Forestry researchers agree that the main causes of the wildfires in Turkey, in addition to the increasing impact of climate change, is poor forestry policies, which are incapable of reducing human-induced fires. In a statement issued after the Hatay fires in 2020, the Turkish Foresters Association stated that a variety of different businesses and facilities (waste storage, mining, tourism facility, HEPPs, electricity transmission lines, etc.) were allowed to operate in forest areas, which significantly increased the risk of fire. In the statement, the Association noted that almost no measures had been taken regarding these facilities (mining, Hydraulic Energy Power Plant, garbage area, etc.) whose numbers continued to increase. They indicated that the first official statements about the Hatay fire revealed that the fire was caused by a transformer explosion (Türkiye Ormancılar Derneği, 2022).

In Muğla, one of the most affected cities in 2021, 12% of the forest fires were caused by negligence and carelessness, 2% were caused intentionally, 29% by lightning and 57% by unknown causes. Among the fires caused by negligence and carelessness, 0.3% were caused by cigarettes, 0.8% by stubble, 3% by garbage, 4% by field cleaning, and 0.5% by other causes. 1.3% were the result of picnic fires and 4% were caused by energy transmission lines. However, the forest area burned as a result of issues related to energy transmission lines in 2021 was 25% (12810,092 Ha) of the total area burned in Muğla (İşçi, 2021). Durmuş, the President of the Agriculture and Forestry Employment Union, claimed that wildfires and their causes are not investigated in detail. Durmuş highlighted issues relating to energy transmission lines in Muğla and he stated that the union had filed a criminal complaint, but that it had been blocked by well-protected pro-government companies such as Cengiz, Limak and Kolin (Çaklı and Candan, 15 May 2022). Given the many causes of wildfires, it is also important, both for researchers and journalists, to note the role played by both the legislature and those institutions responsible for forest management.

#### 3.1. Legislation and the Degradation of Forestlands

In recent years, the number of permits given to construction, mining, tourism and energy companies have increased significantly with negative impacts on natural ecosystems and, in particular, forestlands. Corporations are allowed to rent forest areas in order to run operations on behalf of the public interest for a maximum of 49 years according to Forest Law No. 6831 (Tolunay, 2021). Most activities carried out on behalf of the public interest in forest areas are related to mining, or to conventional (nuclear and coal) or renewable power plants, and the total area covered by these permits as of the end of 2020 was 748,000 ha (Türkiye Ormancılar Derneği, 2022). Furthermore, Mining Law No. 3213, Tourism Encouragement Law No. 2634, and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations allow the use of forestlands for other purposes.

In fact, an Amendment to Tourism Law No. 7334 published in the Official Gazette on July 28, 2021, just before the start of the forest fires, drew the public's attention. According to this Amendment, the authority to open forestlands to tourism investments was given only to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and excluded the municipalities in tourist regions - which are mostly run by opposition parties - and other ministries from the decision process (Yetkin, 31 July 2021). However, it is not possible to build tourism facilities in those areas, which have been consumed or destroyed by fire. These areas are under the protection of Article 169 of the Constitution. (Erdönmez, *Yeşil Gazete*, 3 July 2021). On September 14<sup>th</sup>, the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (hereafter CHP) applied to the Constitutional Court for the cancellation of 15 Articles of the Tourism Promotion law.

### 3.2. Between Protection and Operation: Production in Forestlands

A cursory examination of the relevant legal framework would be useful in order to facilitate an analysis of the related media frames, given the ongoing debate between the government and opposition parties as to where relevant responsibilities lie. According to Article 169 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and Articles 68-76 of the Forest Law No. 6831, which contain special provisions regarding the prevention and extinguishment of forest fires, the forestry organization, the General Directorate of Forestry (Orman Genel Müdürlüğü, hereafter OGM), affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, is responsible for implementing forest-fire-prevention measures.

OGM is, therefore, the public organization responsible for the protection, development and operation of the country's forests. However, recently the organization focused on other aspects of forestry operations - such as the cutting of timber or hunting permits - rather than the protection of forestlands. After the 2021 wildfires, OGM ordered the cutting of all trees to a height of 5 meters along the 276,000 km forest road network and their thinning to a depth of between 25-50 meters under the pretext of firefighting (Türkiye Ormanlılar Derneği, 4 April, 2022). Recently, OGM has sold millions of trees in burned forest areas to companies close to the government at discounts of up to 2,500%. According to the *Cumhuriyet* news story, a single pro-government company provided 70% of Europe's MDF timberboard needs using these trees. (Mollaveisoğlu, 7 April 2022).

Although OGM have made some serious strides especially in terms of fire monitoring systems, there have been problems in providing aircraft and helicopters for use in firefighting, and in relation to the temporary recruitment of fire workers for the fire season alone (Erdönmez, *Yeşil Gazete*, 3 July 2021). Studies indicate that the number of forest workers and those who live in villages within forest precincts has decreased over the past 40 years (from 18 to 7 million) as a result of the recruitment methods employed by OGM, which considers these indigenous people to be the cause of the damage (PROFOR and World Bank, 2017). Yet exclusion of these indigenous people from their habitats and the process of governance makes forests more vulnerable to all sort of damage including wildfires (Atmış, Özden and Lise, 2006).

### 3.3. Debate in Relation to the Turkish Aeronautical Association

Another institution, whose responsibility and capacity became a major issue during the wildfires was the Turkish Aeronautical Association (Türk Hava Kurumu, hereafter THK). The Association is a legal body subject to the Associations Law No. 5253. According to Article 4 of the regulations, the institution is responsible for ensuring the establishment and development of aviation in Turkey, serving the country in the field of general aviation through activities including firefighting, and the provision of air ambulances and scheduled flights. In the past, the institution played a significant role in extinguishing forest fires through tenders initiated by OGM. However, since 2019 because of maintenance problems, its aircraft haven't been used in extinguishing wildfires.

During the 2021 wildfires, President Erdoğan, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Pakdemirli, and other government authorities made controversial statements on the shortcomings in relation to the Association's aircraft. (Bianet, 30 July 2021). Journalists working at opposition newspapers criticized the government on the grounds that it rents firefighting aircraft from Russia at inflated prices while driving the THK to failure.

Celebrities and social media users organized a campaign with the *HelpTurkey* hashtag demanding aircraft from other countries. An investigation was also launched by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in relation to the *HelpTurkey* posts on social media about forest fires in many parts of Turkey. The Presidential Directorate of Communications Director, Altun, denounced the criticism and claimed that, "the so-called aid campaign" was organized by a single account, with ideological motives to show that the state was incapacitated and in order to weaken nation-state

unity" (Gazete Duvar, 5 August 2021). The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) fined 6 TV channels for insulting ministers and other public authorities claiming that they depicted them as incapable and instructed TV channels to not show forest fires (P24, 6 August 2021). Following these instructions, the Governorship of Muğla banned access to some journalists to firefighting areas, which are close to the Kemerköy coal power plant (Dost, *HalkTV*, 5 August 2021) Finally, on November 10<sup>th</sup>, Aşcı, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the THK resigned after facing a serious criticism (*Cumhuriyet*, 10 November 2021).

In June 2022, wildfires emerged in Muğla's Marmaris district again. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry declared that "our aircraft are in the air", however they were not THK aircraft. The 14 aircraft were rented from Spain and Russia and were not amphibious aircraft, which can use water from lakes and other bodies of water, and thus extinguish fires more rapidly (Mollavesioğlu, *Cumhuriyet*, 23 June 2022).

#### 4. Method

This study aims first to question whether news stories on wildfires include references to climate change or not and whether these references are presented with diagnostic or prognostic framings (Benford and Snow, 2000). The use of diagnostic framing by newspapers serves to highlight the causes of wildfires and to apportion responsibility. It also seeks to determine whether any social groups are targeted through the use of stories which employ a banal nationalist style. (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen & Cottle, 2012). The references to wildfires in other countries and the methods employed to fight them may facilitate to link the issue to climate change through necessary comparisons in relation to policies utilized in these countries. Therefore, this study measured also the references to other wildfires in news stories. When prognostic framing is used in news stories, possible solutions in relation to climate policy are put forward (Crow et al., 2016). They also look to identify relevant actors: national government, local government, forest dwellers, etc. This also has a bearing on how the people affected by wildfires are represented. Do newspapers depict them as victims, who need the help of national or local government or as people who are committed to fighting fires? Women or other social groups were also seen to be portrayed as weaker than others (Walkera et al., 2020; Öhman et al., 2016). The study was also inspired by the approaches of Walkera et al. (2020) and Thistlethwaite and Henstra (2019), which underline the importance of critical frame analysis and the role played by the media in influencing policy makers in times of disaster. Based on the elements of media narratives described by Thistlethwaite and Henstra's (2019) and which support policy change, this study aimed to define a roadmap for journalists covering disasters intensified by climate change. These elements consist of identifying the concrete policy problem; linking it to a specific stakeholder; providing evidence to support policy change; specifying policy change; framing the risk and linking it to climate change (Thistlethwaite and Henstra, 2019).

The sample consists of 270 news items chosen from three newspapers between 28 July and 5 August that covered the first 9 days of the wildfires. This period also covers the firefighting process in other countries such as Italy, Russia, Greece, etc. The sample was constructed by scanning the word "wildfire" in three Turkish newspapers: one pro-ruling party paper (AKP) (*Sabah*), one pro-main opposition paper (CHP) (*Sözcü*), and a left-wing digital news media outlet (*Bianet*) in Turkey. *Sabah* is one of the most visited pro-government online newspapers. *Sözcü* is the most read pro-opposition online and print newspaper. *Bianet* doesn't have a vast number of readers, but with its focus on human rights and environmental destruction, it often serves as a reference source for journalists. It also hosts climate-change specialist journalists that allows us to make a comparison between coverage in the mainstream newspapers and in those, which host climate-change specialist journalists (Hopke, 2020).

**Table 1.** Description of news framing resulting from the study

<i>Sabotage-Arson</i>	News which highlights the possibility of sabotage or arson that would be mainly caused for rent-seeking purposes (for tourism or other business sectors)
<i>Turkish Aeronautical Association</i>	News items which focus either on technical issues regarding aircraft or on the administration of the Turkish Aeronautical Association with or without reference to its relations with the government.
<i>Governance of firefighting by central authority</i>	Regardless of its stance (critical or embedded) news articles that refer to the actions taken by all relevant ministries or public institutions (Ministry of Interior, Health, Housing Development Administration -TOKİ- etc.)
<i>Governance of firefighting by local authorities</i>	Regardless of its stance (critical or embedded) news articles that refer to the firefighting strategies and declarations of all mayors or other local authorities such as neighborhood chiefs (mukhtars)
<i>Wildfires and firefighting in other countries</i>	News covering contemporaneous wildfires, which occur in other countries -Italy, Russia, Greece, U.S, Lebanon, etc.)
<i>People's solidarity in firefighting</i>	News items which highlight the solidarity of local forest dwellers in firefighting
<i>Stories of the damage and the victims</i>	News items which refer to the aftermath of wildfires, to the situation of the forests as well as those who live there
<i>Climate change</i>	News items that underline the impact of the climate change in triggering or exacerbating wildfires
<i>Ecological degradation and corruption</i>	News items, which refer to the structure of political and economic systems, facilitating the partial use of forestlands by energy companies and other, which thus gives rise to such wildfires.
<i>Terror</i>	News referring to the possibility of terrorist attack organized by Syrian or Afghan refugees, the PKK or foreign countries

First, news items containing connotations of “climate” and the headlines “breaking news”, which share the same content with other news items -having an original headline and a more detailed account of the story, have been eliminated. Second, the sample has been arranged under the news framings resulting from the themes of the study (see Table 1). Then, these news framings are analyzed in order to categorize them according to prognostic and diagnostic framings as described by Benford and Snow (2000). News items, which proffer solutions regarding firefighting policies or more generally climate adaptation policies are defined as prognostic while those inquiring about the causes of fires are categorized as diagnostic. Finally, social and political actors mentioned in news articles are classified in order to explain more precisely how these politically different newspapers picture social and political actors as offenders, victims or problem solvers/responsible policy makers



and question whether they propose critical policy changes regarding climate adaptation or instead feel satisfied with indicating political or social scapegoats.

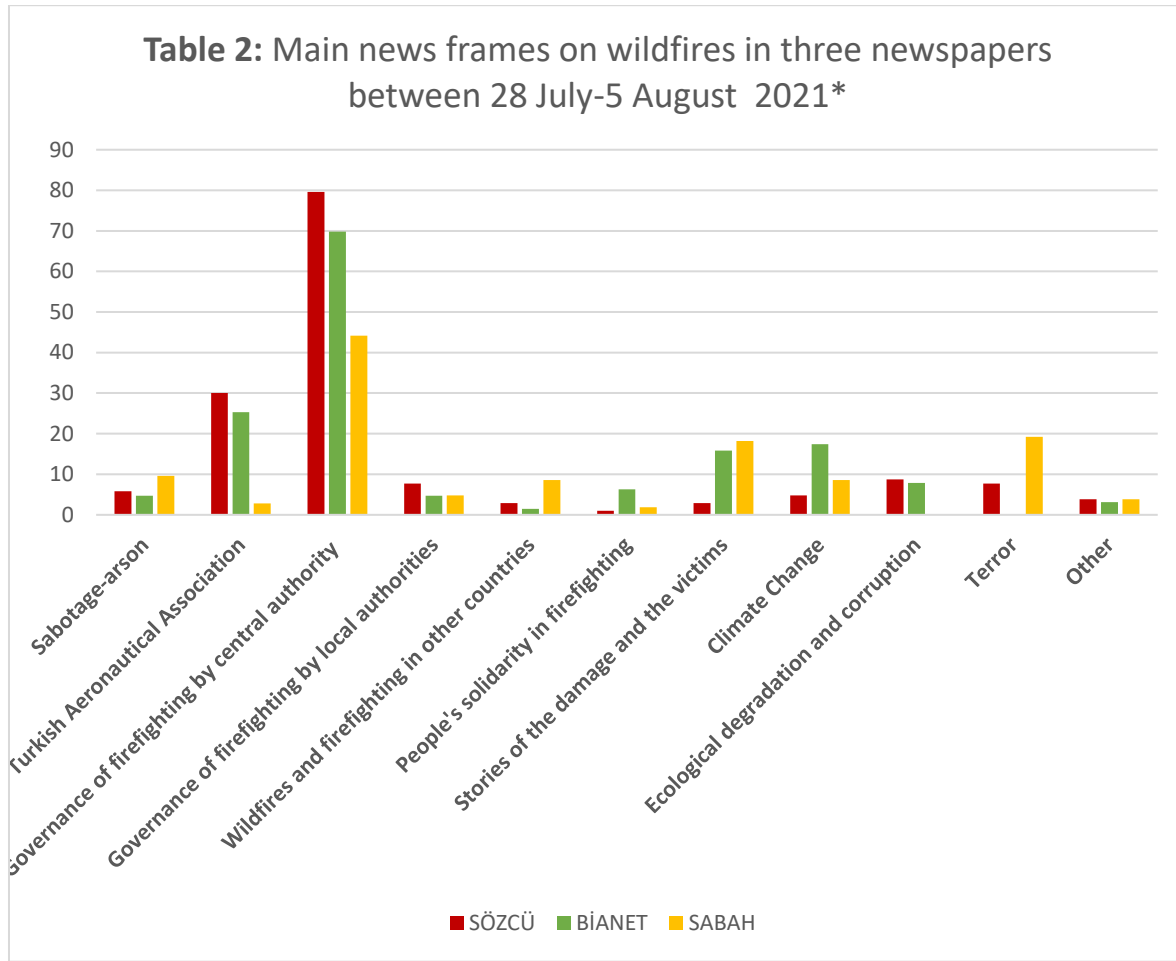
## 5. Key findings: Main Public Debates and Media Frames during the 2021 Wildfires

Results show that climate change is covered in very few news stories in all three publications. *Bianet* was the one with the most references (17.4%) to climate change in its news on wildfires. Neither of newspapers referred to wildfires in other countries to compare their firefighting strategies in terms of climate adaptation policies. Focusing on the firefighting process and its governance, *Sözcü* almost ignored the impact of climate change on wildfires and mentioned it in only five news stories out of a total of 103, while citing those opposition politicians, who had raised the issue in speeches. The pro-government *Sabah* referred to climate change in only nine out of 104 news stories. Five of these news stories cited scientists or scientific reports and four of them included comparisons with other countries. However, in *Sabah*, news, which covered climate change, employed diagnostic framings and underlined the inevitable consequences of climate change rather than setting out solutions as presented by experts or CSOs. In a number of these news items, when authors accepted the deficiencies, especially related to aircraft, they still acclaimed the success of Turkey's firefighting management compared to other countries. In its column entitled "Did AKP also cause Climate Change?" Tezel (*Sabah*, 2 August 2021) asserted that Turkey was a leading country in firefighting, emphasizing how quickly wildfires were extinguished and ignoring the high number of burnt forestlands in Turkey when compared to other countries:

Wildfires in Siberia, one of the coldest places on Earth, have been ongoing for 1 month! 1.5 million hectares of land were destroyed. Turkey is scorching hot, even a cigarette butt, or a broken bottle is enough to start a fire, but we had 107 of 112 fires under control within five days! Remember, the forest fires in Australia lasted for months, the whole continent burned! These are our good days! Climate change will take the world by storm! Forest fires, drought, floods etc. will increase even more.

Otherwise, most of the news related to the "governance of firefighting by central authority" showed that both opposition and pro-government newspapers constructed narratives that fell within the framing of the national context. Shortcomings in relation to firefighting aircraft and the corrupt management of THK were the dominant issue covered by all the newspapers in the sample. Since they asserted that governance problems and the THK were the main causes of wildfires, these framings can be regarded as diagnostic framings. However, they didn't refer to climate change as an intensifying factor.

Only 10.6% of *Sözcü* news (11 out of 103) had prognostic framings and the solutions presented in these news stories were mostly related to recovery, such as the repair of aircraft in the THK fleet or to an increase in their numbers. They also considered budget increases in relation to disaster management. Two news stories with prognostic framings included proactive policy suggestions such as: increasing the number of forest workers, and improving their working conditions.

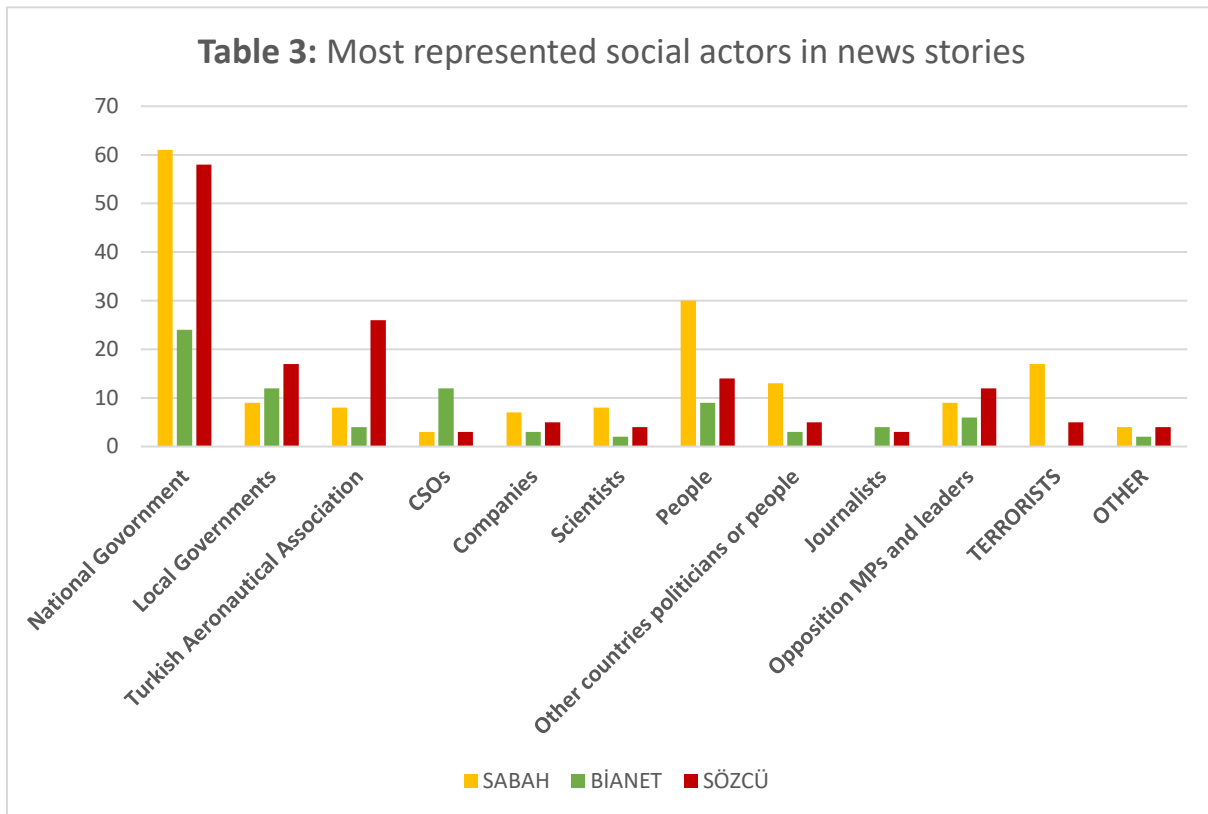


\*Columns show the percentage of each framing according to each newspaper's total number of news stories on wildfires. During the timeframe of the study, the total number of news stories analysed in *Sözcü* was 103, in *Sabah*, 104 and in *Bianet*, 63.

*Sabah* had only four news stories out of a total of 104 with a prognostic framing and two of them contained policy suggestions related to the recruitment of forest workers, penned by the same columnist. The other two news with solutions consisted of recommendations regarding the recovery process such as the renewal of the aircraft fleet or the surveillance of forests by drones to detect arsonists. *Bianet* had the highest percentage (14.2%) of news stories with a prognostic framing. Among these nine news stories, four were related to the recovery process and to public health issues. Through articles written directly by doctors or via interviews with them, *Bianet* drew attention to the psychological problems experienced by child victims and to the possible chemical pollution of drinking water in disaster areas. In this latter news, for instance, the link between forest fires and climate change was clearly mentioned, and comparisons with other countries in terms of risks and precautions were made as well (*Bianet*, 2 August 2021). The other five news stories from *Bianet* covered policy suggestions made by civil society organizations (CSOs) or scholars in order to mitigate the impact of climate change on forest fires and to prevent human-induced wildfires. The need to regularly maintain energy transmission lines and to establish policies that would promote the return of forest workers; were among the suggestions made. Avoiding energy power plant construction in forestland was also highlighted. By citing the press communiques of different CSOs, *Bianet* underlined the need to develop climate-related forest protection policies:

By establishing forest protection programs in relation to climate change, power plants, quarries, tourism facilities etc. in forests should be relocated. (...) Due to global climate change, the average temperatures in our country will increase, and accordingly, similar

disasters will be experienced more frequently and with greater severity. In line with this reality, policies based on climate justice should be developed and implemented against fire and other disasters. (*Bianet*, 5 August 2021)



Although terrorist attack is not among the motives cited in relation to the 2021 wildfires as officially declared by OGM’s report (OGM, 2022), the mainstream media including *Sabah* and *Sözcü*, showed terrorist organizations as the perpetrators of wildfires. After President Erdoğan’s allegations of arson by PKK, a mainstream media outlet referred to the arrest of PKK members, who were supposed to have started fires (*BBC Türkçe*, August 3, 2021). This news was denied by the Manisa governorship, but some journalists and social media users continued to refer to Kurds, Syrians or Afghans starting fires in the forests. Following these accusations, citizens in Manavgat attempted to lynch two people, who had allegedly started a fire. Two young people, whose innocence was later confirmed, were saved thanks to officials, who had gone to the scene to pacify the crowd (*Gazete Duvar*, 30 July 2021).

In other districts of Muğla, people went to the forest at midnight to stand watch after receiving a message on WhatsApp claiming that there were immigrants in the forest, who were trying to start a fire (*Express*, Sept. Nov. 2021, no 177). Both *Sözcü* and *Sabah* accused terrorists of starting the fires, whom they associated with different social groups - Kurds, Syrians, Afghans.

As has been noted, traitor PKK terrorists may have started the fires. Could it be that the spies of the countries that see Turkey as an enemy also burned it? It is possible that those who came from Syria may have used their matches. I curse whoever did it. (*Zeyrek, Sözcü*, 31 July 2021)

But we must admit that at the moment there are concrete suspicions that the fires were started by people (...) In this country, there are terrorist organizations, which consider burning forests to be part of their political struggle... They even have their legal parties (...) They have destroyed forests dozens of times.” (*Altınok, Sabah*, 30 July 2021)

As seen in Table 2 the attribution of responsibility to different social and political actors differs according to the publications' editorial and political views. In parallel with news-frames, "terrorists" as actors are only seen in the *Sabah* and *Sözcü* newspapers; *Bianet* warned journalists and readers against false news on this matter. While the national government - President and related ministries – were the actors most frequently referred to, the opposition newspapers, *Sözcü* and *Bianet*, criticized the government's failure to fulfil its responsibilities regarding the prevention of fires. *Sabah* published statements from the authorities highlighting all of the facilities and staff that had been mobilized. "The people", the second most common actor category in *Sabah*, completes this description. In most of *Sabah*'s news stories "the people" were referenced in 20 out of 30 stories (67%), with fire victims generally depicted as in need of help from the state and apparently powerless. In two of these reports, women victims were depicted as weak because of their gender. *Sözcü* also portrayed fire victims as weak in 57% of its news items (8 out of 14), albeit with a view to criticizing the government, and portrayed "the people in solidarity with one another" in only 6 news stories. In 7 (77%) of the 9 news stories, *Bianet* showed people as strong and in solidarity with one another.

*Sabah* mentioned the leaders and deputies of the opposition parties only in response to their criticism of the THK. Although *Sözcü* mostly included the criticisms of the CHP leader and deputies regarding fire management, it also mentioned the visits of the Good Party (İyi Parti) and Homeland Party (Memleket Partisi) leaders to the region. *Bianet* is the only publication that also included statements from the People's Democratic Party (HDP) deputies.

Similarly, *Sabah* and *Sözcü* gave more space to local authorities close affiliated with their own political views, and showed these mayors helping people and in apparent solidarity with them. *Sabah* defended the government's view, claiming that not only the OGM, but also the municipalities in disaster areas - which are all governed by opposition mayors - had responsibility for extinguishing fires. In *Sözcü* and *Bianet*, news covering "local authorities" criticized the lack of coordination and the exclusion of CHP municipalities from the firefighting process. On the other hand, while *Bianet* and *Sözcü* reported on the restrictions imposed by RTÜK on journalists' news about the wildfires and the difficulties faced by journalists, this news was not featured in *Sabah*.

Companies and their possible role in the cause of fires were almost never mentioned in the news. *Sabah* reported on a tree donation made to TEMA by Cengiz Holding, which has investments in the mining and energy sectors, but did not mention that TEMA declined the donation. One of the few news stories that stood out about companies in *Sözcü* was that in relation to the problems that the tourism sector will experience due to fires. Apart from this, although all three newspapers mentioned YK Energy's thermal power plant, which was in danger due to fires, only *Bianet* mentioned the struggle of the local people against YK Energy, which aims to fell large swathes of the forest in order to expand its territory.

## CONCLUSION

In parallel with global media trends, newspapers covered in this study's sample were likely to be interested in "What is happening now?" (Houston et al. 2012) and used diagnostic news framing rather than making reference to the shaping of possible policy (Crow et al., 2016; Walkera et al., 2020). They focused solely on one policy problem: firefighting governance and, in particular, aircraft deficiencies. The government and THK were the relevant stakeholders noted in all newspapers. While the pro-government *Sabah* newspaper did not see the need for policy change in relation to firefighting, *Sözcü* provided evidence for policy change especially in relation to the administration of the THK. It also hosted experts and scholars who made necessary policy suggestions on this issue. However, other possible offenders, such as the energy and mining companies, their operations and negligence in the maintenance of energy transmission lines and other facilities were almost all ignored by the newspapers. *Sözcü* and *Bianet* represented political actors in a more balanced way and underlined the problems emerging from the lack of coordination between national and local authorities while *Sabah* only covered national authorities and pro-government mayors. When it covered opposition mayors it cited the government's accusations against them namely that the mayors were responsible for extinguishing forest fires in their region, which was not correct. This limited coverage of politicians cemented the actual polarizations (Hovardas, 2014) and blocked possible coverage of solutions regarding coordination between the different political entities at varying levels. Furthermore, in most of the news, references to the links to climate change were absent. In the case of Turkey, it was seen that it is also important to avoid spurious references to terrorist-induced fires in forests, which may serve to forge banal nationalism (Pantti M, Wahl-Jorgensen K. and Cottle S., 2012) and draw attention from genuine causes and offenders.

As underlined by Thistlethwaite and Henstra (2019), defining concrete policy problems is the first step in constructing narratives, which support policy change. However, considering the coverage of the 2021 wildfires, journalists need to change their focus from firefighting management and expand it to cover the whole process of wildfires, and to their relationship to climate change. Certainly, revealing the deficiencies in relation to specific firefighting instances is necessary, but not sufficient in itself. In this sense, covering the entire spectrum of issues related to wildfires means analyzing and discussing in detail those elements of forest management that trigger wildfires. In the case of Turkey, some of the above-mentioned issues such as the working conditions and numbers of forest workers; legislation in relation to the use of sensitive forestland by companies; control over the maintenance of energy transmission lines, and measures against drought should be considered separately in the context of policy suggestion framings by journalists. In providing evidence for needed policy change, relevant stakeholders should be canvassed, including scientists, CSOs, specialists in the field and local people. For instance, the inclusion of forest workers, farmers, small merchants in tourist towns and other residents' is necessary if resilience and a framing, which emphasizes climate justice are to be prioritized (Doruk, 2021).

In analyzing the wildfire coverage of three politically different newspapers, this study aimed to uncover the problems associated with news framings, and in doing so attempted to outline a roadmap for climate change-related wildfire coverage. Future studies covering other newspapers and post disaster periods may serve to develop both this study and the roadmap to wildfire coverage expanding the range of policy suggestion framings.

### Compliance with Ethical Standard

**Conflict of Interests:** There is no conflict of interest between the authors and the other persons.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

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