MEDİAD

A Research on Salafism's Discourses on YouTube in Terms of Political Participation, Democracy and Social Cohesion

Mevlüt UĞURLU*

Abstract

Salafis, one of the religious groups, have begun to spread their views in society through digital preachers by taking advantage of the opportunities of new media. This process causes tension and anomie to emerge between the norms and values of society and Salafi groups. From this point of view, the aim of this study is to reveal the political aims of Salafi religious groups in the context of Türkiye and the means and strategies they prefer to achieve this aim. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the case study approach, one of the qualitative research method designs, was used. The videos of 6 preachers selected through the purposeful sampling technique were obtained through the document review technique. The videos were analyzed using thematic analysis method by transferring them to text. As a result, the views of Salafi preachers were grouped under 3 different categories: Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism, Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism, and Passive and Conjunctural Salafism. These different titles have shown us that Salafism does not exhibit a monolithic religious thought and practices and that they can differ from each other in terms of their purposes and the tools they use in the context of Türkiye. Thus, the multifaceted nature of Salafism and the fact that it can have different religious interpretations even within the same society and culture have been revealed.

Keywords: Salafism, Salafi Preachers, Anomie, Political Participation, Democracy, Religion, YouTube

Siyasal Katılım, Demokrasi ve Sosyal Uyum Açısından Selefiliğin YouTube'daki Söylemleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Öz

Dini gruplardan biri olan Selefiler yeni medyanın imkanlarından istifade ederek dijital vaizler aracılığıyla görüşlerini toplumda yaymaya başlamışlardır. Bu süreç, toplumun norm ve değerleriyle Selefi gruplar arasında bir gerilim ve anominin ortaya çıkmasına neden olmaktadır. Buradan hareketle bu çalışmanın amacı Selefi dini grupların Türkiye bağlamında siyasal amaçlarını ve bu amaca ulaşmada tercih ettikleri araçları ve stratejileri ortaya çıkarmak olarak belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın amacına ulaşabilmek için nitel araştırma yöntemi desenlerinden durum (vaka) çalışması yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Amaçlı örnekleme tekniği aracılığıyla seçilen 6 tebliğcinin videoları doküman inceleme tekniğiyle elde edilmiştir. Videolar metne aktarılarak tematik analiz yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, Selefi vaizlerin görüşleri Mutlakçı ve Dışlayıcı Selefilik, Bağlamsal ve Pragmatik Selefilik ile Pasif ve Konjonktürel Selefilik olmak üzere 3 farklı kategori altında toplanmıştır. Bu farklı başlıklar bize Selefiliğin yekpare bir dini düşünce ve pratikler sergilemediğini ve Türkiye bağlamında sahip oldukları amaçlar ve kullandıkları araçlar bakımından birbirinden farklılaşabildiklerini göstermiştir. Böylece Selefiliğin çok yönlü doğası ve aynı toplum ve kültür içinde dahi farklı dini yorumlamalara sahip olabildiği ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Selefilik, Selefi Vaizler, Anomi, Siyasal Katılım, Demokrasi, Din, YouTube

* Res. Assist. Dr., Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, e-mail: mevlutugurlu@nevsehir.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-5860-9543, Nevşehir, Türkiye

Introduction

Recently, it has been observed that the digital environment has become an integral part of our daily lives by providing individuals and groups with a platform to express their views, beliefs, and ideologies on a global scale and present them to large audiences. Among these, one of the most prominent is the video-sharing platform YouTube, which serves as a powerful tool for the dissemination of information and opinions, including those related to religious beliefs and practices. From this perspective, this study focuses on the digital presence of Salafi communities on the YouTube platform and their interactions with political institutions and components in Türkiye.

Groups that have adopted Salafi thought manage to garner a certain level of interest in society through their emphasis on the pure interpretation of religion and their views on contemporary political discourse. Salafi thought uses digital platforms to convey religious ideals, reach a diverse and broad audience from youth to women (Thurston, 2015, p. 1060), interact with followers, and influence broader societal discussions. Like social media influencers, Salafi preachers aim to attract a large following, gain their love and trust, and influence their decisions (Sorgenfrei, 2021, p. 214). Many topics, such as Türkiye's political structure and political institutions, are prominently discussed in the YouTube videos of digital preachers.

From a sociological standpoint, the evolution of the 'Salafi' notion illustrates the dynamic nature of Islamic thinking and practice throughout history. The emergence of this concept and its meanings stems from the social and cultural context of the Islamic world, reflecting people's responses to the changing social, political, and cultural realities of their times in their understanding and practice of religion. According to Üçer (2021, p. 46):

> It is known that in the emergence of sects or schools of thought, which are the embodiment of different religious understandings or the phenomenon of differences in religious understandings, the main elements such as human, social environment, place/geography, time, and the connection between ideas and events, as well as every political, economic, social, and cultural event that arises in time and space, and every 'established belief' that exists together with language, social structures, and mentality codes, naturally play a significant role.

In this regard, the historical and conceptual evolution of the Salafi identity can be considered a response to the challenges faced by Muslims in different periods and various cultural and geographical contexts. According to Demir (2014, p. 14), the rigid or flexible nature of Salafism's characteristic structure is determined by the governance model and institutional frameworks of the countries in which this movement is situated.

In some contexts, it can be said that the Salafi identity emerged as a reaction to political situations such as colonialism and the decline of Islamic political power, as well as social tensions and conflicts. In other contexts, Salafi identity has been a response to theological and intellectual challenges to the defended religion, such as the rise of secularism and the decline of traditional Islamic education and science in Muslim states and societies. Deniz (2021, pp. 86–89), states that recently, Salafi identity has increasingly been associated with political and social movements, especially in the Arab world. The rise of political movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadist Salafi movements like Al-Qaeda has had a significant impact on the meaning and usage of

the concept 'Salafi' today. Not only does the concept define a religious identity, but it also describes a specific political and ideological approach.

When examining the literature, it is observed that a significant number of scholarly works investigate Salafi religious thought. The Salafism literature in Türkiye encompasses many studies that analyze ideology, activities, and social impact of this religious movement. The research titled "Salafi Mindset and Türkiye" presents potential counterpoints that could serve as alternatives within religious discourse and methodologies while elucidating the Salafi mindset (Uyanık, 2018). In the study titled "Salafism in Türkiye on Twitter: Social Network Analysis", written by Yunus Emre Tapan (2019), a social network analysis is conducted to investigate the prevalence of Salafism on the Twitter platform. This research provides information about the propaganda and discourse surrounding Salafism in the realm of social media. Şener Nazırhan's (2020) study, "The Construction of Salafi Islam in Türkiye", delves deeply into the process of shaping religious beliefs and practices within the Salafi movement in Türkiye. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding the different religious discourses embedded within Salafism. The research titled "Salafism-Wahhabism and Their Activities in Türkiye", prepared by Bekir Altun (2015) discusses the historical connections between Salafism and Wahhabism in Türkiye and seeks to understand the historical development and regional activities of these ideologies. There are also studies that provide a glimpse into the current landscape of radical religiosity in Türkiye. Focusing on specific educational platforms such as Lessons on Tawhid and Salafiyyah websites (which are prominent online platforms related to Salafi teachings in Türkiye), Sağır (2013) investigates the expansionist aspects of Salafism in the context of Türkiye. The research by Damla Taşdemir (2016) discusses the interaction between the Salafi movement in Türkiye and religious radicalism. This study explorers the broader societal impact of the movement by uncovering potential intersections and causal relationships. Finally, the study conducted by Demirbilek and Atalay (2018) analyzes the challenges of researching Salafism in the Turkish context, highlighting the methodological difficulties researchers face in their quest to understand it. Although these studies generally contribute to Salafism research, some theoretical limitations have been observed in the literature. Therefore, a necessity has arisen to discuss the relationship between Salafism and social and political contexts within the framework of interdisciplinary and social theoretical approaches.

It is important to determine whether Salafism should be considered solely a religious movement or a political actor that questions and even threatens the existing political and social order. Based on this, this study aims to reveal the perspectives of Salafi preachers, who represent Salafi communities as a religious group, on the political institution in their YouTube videos, both under certain conceptualizations and themes and in the light of social theory. In this context, the main problem of the research is what kind of political and social goals Salafi thought has in the context of Türkiye and what solutions it adopts or rejects to achieve these goals. This study seeks to explore the aims of Salafi groups in Türkiye and to analyze the various strategies they adopt or reject in achieving these goals, investigating how these strategies are expressed in their discussions and justified through their methods.

The subquestions of the research have been determined as follows:

– What kind of approach do Salafi preachers have toward democracy and political parties?

– How can the approaches of Salafi preachers towards political institutions and political participation be understood within the framework of tension and cohesion theories?

We used the case study technique, one of the qualitative research designs, to find answers to these research questions. The digital video contents of six Salafi preachers, each corresponding to a case, on YouTube were explored with a thematic analysis technique; their approaches to political participation tools at the discourse level were analyzed within the framework of religious goals. In this context, the study aims to reveal both the strategic views of Salafi preachers regarding the relationship between their aims and means, as well as the forms and patterns of political positioning of Salafism within Türkiye.

1. Salafi and Salafism: A Conceptual Evaluation

Examining how political, social, and cultural factors influence the development of concepts and their historical reconstruction is an important issue. This study's conceptual framework, Salafism/Salafiyya, derives from the word Salaf. Generally, dictionaries use the Arabic-origin word 'Salaf' in meanings related to the past. These usages can be listed as follows: 'Those who came before' (İbn Manzur, 1955, p. 158), 'Pioneers, past, ancestors' (El-Isfahani, 2010, pp. 507-508), and 'to come before, to pass, to be in the past' (Özervarlı, 2009, p. 399). This definition necessarily gives rise to a school of thought. Each new definition made by these schools of thought also acquires new meanings according to these schools. Indeed, a Salafi school of thought has emerged within Islamic theology, distinguished by its strict adherence to early Islamic teachings and its unique characteristics.

In Salafi religious thought, the first three centuries, including the period of Prophet Muhammad, are idealized both in terms of actors and religious thought and practices. The reason for this idealization is based on the hadith in which Prophet Muhammad stated that the best of the community are those who lived in his time (the Companions), then those who come after them (the Followers), and then those who follow them (the Followers of the Followers). The concept "Salafi" refers to individuals who identify with the religious beliefs and practices of the first three generations mentioned in this hadith. According to the Salafis, Islam was best understood and implemented through the first three generations of Muslims, and appropriate answers and solutions to the challenges and problems that Muslims might face in every era were produced. Muslims who came after the first generations, as well as those in the future, need to follow the religious interpretations and practices established during this early period of Islam for understanding, interpreting, and living Islam (Koca, 2018, p. 12). Instead of using reason to address encountered problems, they should apply the solutions of the first Muslim generations exactly as they were. According to this approach, the successors, or succeeding Muslim generations, should follow the method of the first Muslim generations, known as the Salaf, in understanding and interpreting religion (Alkan, 2016, p. 89).

Salafiyyah corresponds to the concept of Salafism in Turkish. Salafiyyah (Salafism) can be defined as a school of thought in Islamic philosophy that views the first three centuries of Islam as uniform regarding religious beliefs and practices, attributing a shared understanding of religion to this era. Additionally, the concept Salafi is also used to refer to those who follow such thoughts and

views. Such a method of thought opposes the literal interpretation of the texts in the Qur'an and hadiths.

2. The Intellectual Structure of the Salafi Religious Movement

The hadith of Prophet Muhammad mentioned above has led to the actors and practices of a certain time period being accepted as references in many areas, such as social, cultural, economic, and political, by the Salafi ideology and school. This hadith led Islamic thought to refer to these actors as 'Salaf Salihin' (Kubat, 2017, p. 127). The concept 'Salih' encompasses meanings such as acting according to the principles of the religion and possessing upright morals. Therefore, the path to being a good Muslim, as appreciated in Islam, involves taking the moral understanding of the Salaf as-Salih as an example. However, some individuals and groups, instead of viewing the religious practices of a certain era as a temporal experience, have incorporated them into religion (Koca, 2018, p. 12), causing them to become principles in shaping the religious and legal rules of their eras. In fact, in Islamic history, the first generations of Muslims were attributed a sacred status for their religious understanding and practices, resulting in an untouchable status and thus keeping them away from criticism and objections.

In religion, using reason, criticism, interpretation, or adaptation has been firmly opposed by considering historical transmissions called 'narration' as the source of knowledge (Aydın, 2016, p. 190). For a source to be religiously valid, it must have been passed down from the first three generations of Islam. In this context, Salafism demonstrates a complete adherence to the religious understanding of the first three centuries of Islam. This perspective emerges as a pure and essentialist approach to Islam, viewing this early period of Islam as the model for every subsequent era (İşcan, 2017, p. 30). In this way, the effort to return to a pure and essentialist Islam seeks to carry the past into the present. In other words, Salafism can be characterized as an attempt to create a vision of the future based on the past (Kutlu, 2018, p. 73). This perspective argues that the past and future eras and social experiences do not possess separate and different dynamics, social phenomena, and contexts. Therefore, we should take social institutions, daily life, and past social and religious experiences as examples and implement them accordingly.

Salafism has not been as effective in Türkiye due to the Naqshbandi and Sufi-based understanding of religion, despite its influence in other countries. The Turkish Islamic belief, which exhibits a tolerant attitude towards differences and the other, has a culture and experience of coexistence due to this characteristic and has generally been distant from extreme religious approaches (Büyükkara, 2020, p. 60). Mostly, Salafi preachers who received religious education in Arab countries and came to Türkiye appear to have organized a specific community, but the influence of the Salafi-Wahhabi thought tradition, which forms the basis of their religious views, has not extended beyond a limited circle. Salafi preachers gather followers in some cities today through organizations like associations, foundations, publishing houses, and madrasas (Altun, 2022, p. 162). They spread their religious ideology via regular meetings called 'sohbet' (conversation) and share their religious thoughts with a broader audience on new media platforms. Salafism typically organizes under various organizations in the Islamic world, and in Türkiye, it primarily revolves around charismatic Salafi preachers. The literature that emerges based on generalizations and conceptualizations of Salafi religious thought is generally produced based on the sermon contents and rhetoric of these Salafi preachers.

3. Anomie and Forms of Social Cohesion in Society

In society, individuals have various goals encoded both individually and culturally. To achieve these goals, they use various tools in the same way. Sociologists have theorized this process as the means-ends relationship. This concept provides guidance in understanding the decision-making processes of individuals and groups and how they act within a social context. All actions occur within a specific context and framework of means and ends (Honderich, 2005, p. 246). This process can also be considered an indicator of whether the social order is functioning properly. The creation and maintenance of social welfare closely relate to the connection between goals and the means to achieve these goals (Bierstedt, 1938, pp. 665–666).

The means chosen to achieve goals generally reflect social norms and personal ethical values. However, individuals or social groups occasionally attempt to achieve their goals by employing methods that do not align with social norms and values. In other words, they tend to use tools that align with their beliefs, ethical values, and ideologies but are incompatible and even in conflict with the existing culture. This situation can cause tension and conflicts in society. Merton refers to this situation as anomie. The concept of anomie, according to Merton (1968, p. 216) differs from the meaning assigned by Durkheim in that it is described as "a cultural disruption that arises especially when there is a sharp distinction between cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of group members to act in accordance with them." In the emergence of this situation, the social positions individuals hold can hinder them from acting in accordance with cultural values. Therefore, the social structure can restrict the emergence of certain behaviors in a way that does not align with cultural expectations (Ritzer & Stephisky, 2019, p. 258). However, society also observes a harmony between individuals and normative values. When individuals try to achieve the goals determined by society using the means suggested by society, a state of conformity arises (Poloma, 2017, p. 57).

Merton's strain theory analyzes five different response patterns that individuals and groups develop when there is a dissonance between socially and culturally defined goals and the means designated to achieve those goals. He identified these response patterns as modes of adaptation. Thus, Merton (1938, p. 676) developed the following typology and the behavioral patterns exhibited by these typologies by examining the ways individuals and groups adapt or conform within the social structure.

Table 1. Merton's Table of Strain Typologies

Modes of Adaptation	Modes of Adaptation	Institutionalized Means
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	+	-
Ritualism	-	+
Retreatism	-	-
Rebellion	±	±

The plus (+) signs in this table represent acceptance, while the minus (-) signs represent rejection. The plus-minus (±) sign, on the other hand, represents the rejection of prevailing values and the development of new values. The typology of individuals' paths to adaptation can be detailed as follows.

'Conformity' refers to the acceptance of cultural goals and institutionalized means. According to Merton (1938, p. 677), this mode of behavior is the most common and ensures social balance and continuity. However, there are also cases where individuals refuse to use institutionalized means. As highlighted by Merton (1938), the form of adaptation known as 'Innovation' is considered a cultural goal, but it rejects the use of institutionalized means to achieve these goals. The reason for the rejection of institutional means is insufficient socialization, and the individual tries to achieve cultural goals through newly discovered paths. Thus, conflict and frustration are eliminated (p. 678). In the type of adaptation called 'Ritualism', the cultural goals of society are rejected, but the institutionalized means continue to be accepted. Merton (1938, p. 678) argues that in this type of behavior, individuals abandon their goals at an unreachable point but continue to adhere to traditional means. This leads to what is termed ritualism. The individual knows that they cannot achieve their goal due to their social position, but they continue to fulfill their social role. Tools are continued not to achieve the goal, but merely as a ritual. In 'Retreatism', cultural goals and the institutionalized means to achieve them are rejected. According to Merton (1938, p. 677), this form of behavior is the least observed in societies. Individuals who adopt this behavior are within society but are not a part of it. Sociologically, they form true outsiders. With escape mechanisms like silence, individuals withdraw from the cultural demands of society. Those who exhibit such behaviors generally concentrate in the same areas, which can lead to the formation of a subculture (Kızılçelik, 1994, p. 476). In the final form of adaptation called 'Rebellion', cultural goals and institutionalized means are rejected to change the social structure. This behavior, with its marginal perspective, attempts to build a new social order by rejecting the dominant standard values (Merton, 1938, p. 678). For there is a state of dissonance and conflict with the existing social norms and values. Therefore, social and cultural elements are intended to be redefined, aiming to create a new society that aligns with them (Kızılçelik, 1994, p. 477).

When examining the table of adaptation typologies above, it is observed that the typologies other than the one in the first row are similar to each other. The first type of adaptation behavior fully aligns with cultural goals and institutionalized tools, while other types of behavior may deviate from these goals and tools in some way. Therefore, the behaviors other than the first type are also in a state of deviation (Kızılçelik, 1994, p. 477).

Although Merton's strain theory was initially proposed to explain deviant behaviors in modern capitalist society, it can be applied to understand the reactions of Salafism to the political system today. By analyzing Salafism with Merton's strain theory, it can be revealed how religious movements respond to the political tensions they are involved in and how these responses resemble or differ from each other. The strategies that Salafis have developed and adopted to manage the tension they experience with the political system can be theoretically grounded by applying Merton's typology of adaptation. Thus, placing the research data within Merton's framework makes the findings theoretically meaningful and comprehensible.

4. Methodology

We used the case study approach, one of the qualitative research method designs, in this study. The qualitative research method has emerged as a method developing within the interpretive-constructivist tradition (Bal, 2016, p. 70). The case study approach is a qualitative research method design in which a single case or a small number of cases are identified for in-depth examination. Additionally, the case study design includes a detailed and holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 2013, p. 46).

The research utilized video content from popular Salafi preachers on YouTube as its data source. We included six popular Salafi preachers in the study using the purposive sampling technique. Each of the Salafi preachers represents a case in this study. To avoid calculated or cautious reactions that might arise in a private research setting, video analysis was preferred over direct interviews to fully examine the discourse as it was presented to the public.

Based in Istanbul, Halis Bayancuk (Ebu Hanzala) publishes his sermons through the YouTube channel 'Ebu Hanzala Hoca' and is affiliated with the organization Tevhid Kitabevi. Abdullah Yolcu, who is likewise active in Istanbul, produces content through the channel Guraba Yayınları and is affiliated with the religious group Guraba İlim Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği (Gruba-Der). Located in Konya, Murat Gezenler conveys his religious discourses through the publishing house Şehadet Kitap and extends his outreach via his YouTube channel Şehadet Mektebi. Previously located in Türkiye but later moving abroad to operate in Syria, Musa Olğaç (Musa Ebu Cafer) has been producing content through the channel named 'Nakil Kürsüsü' without being directly affiliated with any institutional structure, although his location has changed from time to time. Based in Nevşehir, Musab Köylüoğlu offers content on various topics on his channel, which bears his name, in connection with the İkra İlim Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği. Mehmet Balcıoğlu (Ebu Said Yarbuzi) conducted activities in Antalya under both a digital channel and a religious organization named 'Yarpuz İslami İlimler Araştırma Merkezi' before he passed away due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The data for the study is based on document examination techniques conducted between November 1, 2021, and March 1, 2022. According to the Document Variable Statistics obtained through the Maxqda Qualitative Data Analysis Program, among the most discussed topics in the videos of these 6 Salafi preachers, politics ranked in the top 3. Therefore, the study analyzed videos related to politics in accordance with its research focus. The analysis of the videos included in the study was conducted using the Maxqda Qualitative Data Analysis Program.

The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis "focuses on analytical techniques to search for themes and patterns within the data" (Glesne, 2020, p. 259) and helps the researcher identify common and different aspects. Additionally, this type of analysis "focuses on understanding within a data set, allowing the researcher to see and interpret collective or shared meanings and experiences" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; as cited in Toker, 2022, p. 330). The thematic analysis process systematically analyzed the data within the framework of the main and sub-problems of the research, using coding techniques. Next, we identified patterns, relationships, and themes within the data. Afterwards, we presented the obtained themes as headings in the findings section.

In the coding process, in Vivo Coding and Value Coding were used among the types of coding. In Vivo Coding uses concepts derived directly from the vocabulary of a specific subculture, based on the participants' own expressions. The key concept here is expressed verbatim (Saldana, 2019, p. 106). Value Coding, on the other hand, is "the application of codes that represent the values, attitudes, and beliefs reflecting the participant's perspectives or worldview to qualitative data." (Saldana, 2019, p. 131). In this study, the views and beliefs of Salafi preachers related to the research question are shown using direct quotes, following the thematic analysis method. An expert in the field regularly reviewed and confirmed the coding decisions, following a systematic process.

The findings of the study and its interpretation are limited to the videos on YouTube collected between November 1, 2021, and March 1, 2022. Electronic data may be subject to removal, updates, access restrictions, or deletion over time. Therefore, the videos selected as data sources for the study encompass those that were accessible on YouTube during this time. From the collection of data to the analysis and reporting process, all stages and the procedures followed have been presented as described above to ensure the methodological consistency and reliability of the research.

5. Findings

According to the research data, politics and political participation hold a significant and central place in the thought system of the Salafi preachers included in the study. The transfer of the religious topics they convey to their followers from theory to practice can be achieved through the political institution. As will be discussed in detail below, some of these individuals see the political institution as an obstacle to achieving their goals, while others see it as a tool.

These preachers try to convey their religious views to large audiences both through new media tools and through various organizations in real life. The subscriber counts of 6 Salafi preachers' YouTube channels have reached a total of 442,000 people. They do not have such a large following in real life. Therefore, new media recognizes these preachers and helps them spread their views. Some of these people who use sermon meetings to propagate their religious beliefs have typically also written books. While the masses previously pursued their religious education and development through books, it now seems that a new tool has been adopted for learning religious knowledge and attaining religious consciousness. Therefore, it seems highly likely that the factor causing these individuals to be recognized is videos rather than books. Social media content currently has a wider reach and accessibility than books. It can be seen that, even in the case of Salafism, which is a strict and traditionalist school, the relationship between new media and religion can strongly come to the forefront. Online discussion meetings are generally open to everyone, and at the end of the discussions, a question-and-answer session is held, with these segments being broadcast on YouTube channels.

During the data analysis process, it was observed that topics such as democracy and political parties tend to produce tension and anomie in Salafi thought's sermons. In this context, we have investigated Salafi religious thought's perspective on political participation by examining the goals of their approaches. The contents of the sermons have been coded in terms of expressions such as democracy, political parties, and voting, and the perspectives on political participation have been grouped under various themes. Using the inductive analysis technique, the views of Salafi preachers were assessed based on similarities and differences, and the 6 Salafi preachers included

in the study were classified accordingly. Three themes emerged from this classification: Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism, Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism, and Passive and Conjunctural Salafism. These findings help us to deeply understand the various perspectives of Salafi thought on political participation.

5.1. The Approach of Salafi Religious Thought to Political Participation and Social Integration in YouTube Sermons

The following excerpts address the criticisms, views, and comments of these religious leaders regarding democracy and political parties. These include doubts about democracy, the role of elected representatives, and questions regarding the compatibility of democratic processes with Islamic principles.

In the first quote, Abdullah Yolcu highlights the importance of the concept of intention in Islamic practices. His argument here is that if the intention supports Sharia, a Muslim can engage in actions that may seem contradictory to Islamic principles. For example, some of these actions are visiting Anıtkabir or taking an oath, which may be perceived as contrary to Islamic beliefs (Yolcu, 2014, 00:14:40-00:15:30):

> All scholars—those of his time, those before him, those after him, and those of today—say that it is permissible, but with one condition: What is your intention in entering? You must go there with the goal of establishing the Sharia. When you enter this field, you will be compelled to make certain compromises. But what saves you in this situation? It is your intention (niyyah) and your interpretation (ta'wil). For instance, one goes to Anıtkabir [Atatürk's mausoleum], one takes the oath of office... Scholars say that if these acts are done with an interpretive justification and not as a matter of belief—if the person says, 'We are doing this to bring about democracy' or similar statements—then ta'wil may offer salvation. But if these actions are rooted in belief, then the person becomes a disbeliever.

In his second quote, Yolcu addresses the discourse of intention more deeply by linking it to the concept of belief. He draws attention to the danger of failing to fulfill the intention expressed by the individual in relation to the political institution and democracy. According to him, a person may risk being considered a disbeliever, or apostate, if their actions within the political institution serve personal interests and showiness rather than align with the intention of spreading Sharia (Yolcu, 2014, 00:18:31-00:19:10):

> So what is the condition here? It is intention. But if you corrupt that intention after entering [parliament], you become a disbeliever. That is, if you do not act in accordance with your original intention—if instead you work for show, for status, for a seat of power—then Allah knows better than any of us, and again, you become a disbeliever. However, if your intention is to bring about Sharia, to create breathing space for Muslims, to open paths for them, then yes, this becomes a form of da'wah (invitation to Islam). In certain contexts, it may even be considered an act of worship. And in other contexts, it may be a form of jihad. This is how the scholars speak on the matter.

In his last quote, Yolcu emphasizes voting as a form of worship, a duty that may be obligatory or recommended depending on the situation. He stresses that even if the political institution's leaders or parties are flawed, it is a duty to support them if they defend Islam and its followers. In this context, they cite Türkiye as an example, emphasizing its role as the global stronghold of Islam (Yolcu, 2014, 00:41:12-00:42:14):

> Voting, for us, can at times be considered an act of worship. In some cases, it is recommended (mustahabb), in others obligatory (wajib). According to our intention, Allah will reward us accordingly. Allah has given us reason—

whichever path offers us a way out, we will follow it. Even if we vote for the AK Party today and praise them, it doesn't mean we share in their sins, if they have any. They will be held accountable for their own actions. Their presence in power simply brings us relief... Especially today, Türkiye is our last stronghold, friends. Look at the Islamic world—no one else is standing up in the name of Islam. But Türkiye defends the oppressed in all Muslim countries. Wouldn't you support such a person, such a party? We have reason, we have logic.

Unlike Abdullah Yolcu, who sees participation in democratic processes as a religious ritual, Ebu Hanzala describes democracy itself as a religion, arguing that it fundamentally contradicts Islamic principles. He claims that democracy, which has its own unique form of governance, understanding of freedom, norms of human rights, and economic system, cannot coexist with true Islamic governance. Therefore, he argues against using democracy as a tool to serve religion (Hanzala, 2019, 00:03:09-00:03:27):

> Democracy is a religion. It has its own understanding of governance, freedom, human rights, and even its own economic system. From this perspective, it is not possible for a Muslim to accept democracy or to believe that they can serve their religion through democracy.

In another quote, Ebu Hanzala (2019, 00:08:53-00:09:05) asserts that democracy is a form of polytheism: "If democracy is shirk (polytheism), and you acknowledge it as such, then with what logic or reason are you trying to establish Allah's religion on earth through something that contains shirk?" As a result, he labels individuals who participate in democratic systems, particularly through voting, as polytheists who directly commit shirk.

In his next explanation, Ebu Hanzala defines democracy as a game where certain authorities decide the outcome. According to him, democracy is a deceptive game in which the masses are led to believe they hold power, while real power remains in the hands of the ruling elite. In this process, he criticizes how capital and the media influence democratic outcomes and argues that, from his perspective, individuals identified as Muslims have no chance of winning democratic elections (Hanzala, 2019, 00:10:45-00:11:25):

> Democracy is a game like this. The rulers are already known. The ruling class is predetermined. People believe they are governing themselves and that they are choosing their own leaders, but in reality, the ones in power never change. For example, let me ask you this: if you, as a Muslim, were to say 'I want to implement Allah's Sharia and participate in the elections,' God forbid—would anyone allow you to enter the elections? No one would. Such a thing is simply not possible. And even if you were allowed to participate, there would be no chance of winning. Because the media and the press are controlled by certain hands, and whoever they want the public to know about and support, that's who they put in the spotlight.

In his latest quote, Ebu Hanzala criticizes attempts to draw parallels between democracy and the Islamic governance model of shura, viewing such comparisons as harmful to Islam (2018, 1:00:12-1:00:53):

> To say that democracy and the Islamic concept of shura are the same—speaking from the perspective of our time—is to legitimize a system of disbelief (kufr) like democracy in the eyes of the people. And doing so is one of the greatest harms that can be inflicted upon the religion of Islam.

In summary, Ebu Hanzala views democracy as a threat to the integrity and harmony of Islamic doctrine and practices. He equates democratic processes and the participation of Muslim individuals in these processes with shirk, the greatest sin in Islam, which is defined as a deviation from the fundamental principles and ideals of Islam, and sees a conflict between Islamic principles and democratic governance. His views exhibit a rigid perspective that does not accept the synthesis of Islamic doctrine and practices with non-Islamic teachings within a specific socio-political context.

Quotes attributed to Ebu Said Yarbuzi present another Salafi perspective on the role of democracy. In the first quote, Yarbuzi clearly states that he sees democracy as a separate religion. However, democracy also receives critical approval in the context of Türkiye due to the advantages it provides to Muslim communities, similar to Abdullah Yolcu's approach (Yarbuzi, 2019, 00:03:40-00:04:12):

> It is we who call democracy an independent religion. It is we who say that its creed is secularism, and its schools of thought in practice are political parties. Yet if we, in the current context, approve of or support certain individuals despite all their faults, it must be because there is some definite benefit (maslaha) for this religion and for the Muslims.

In the following quote, where he addresses the results of democratic elections, Yarbuzi discusses an example where an election was won by a party with "anti-religious thought." He blames this situation on those he labels as "takfiris," who oppose participating in democratic processes. He harshly criticizes the refusal of Muslims to participate in democratic elections in a way that would be favorable to them (Yarbuzi, 2018, 00:01:04-00:01:36):

> You saw it in the last elections. While someone who claims to believe should have come to power—or at the very least, a non-believer who wouldn't harm us—instead, in Yalova, a member of the CHP with a mindset hostile to religion won by six votes. Do you know how many takfiri individuals infected with this plague are in Yalova? They were the ones who elected him.

In the last quote provided below, Yarbuzi exemplifies and concretizes a pragmatic approach to participation in democratic processes. He claims that Muslims may need to make practical decisions within this system given the current social climate. His stance seems to aim toward minimizing harm. When Muslims are faced with two undesirable options in contexts contrary to their religion, they may choose the one that causes less harm or provides greater protection for Islamic beliefs. This approach suggests that Muslim individuals or communities can make pragmatic decisions within the constraints of the systems they live in (Yarbuzi, 2015, 00:17:07-00:18:12):

> We prefer someone who provides good public services. That is, if we must choose between two non-believers—one who steals from the public and one who does not—we choose the one who does not. I am a Belgian citizen. When I am required to vote, we choose the party that offers broader freedoms for our beliefs. We choose the one that protects our rights. This decision of ours is never an endorsement of their falsehood or irreligion. We simply prefer this over someone who is more evil, more dangerous, and a more aggressive enemy to us. We must properly understand and distinguish between making our stance known and, God forbid, supporting falsehood.

In summary, Yarbuzi's views express the tension between doctrinal opposition to democracy and a pragmatic approach to democratic processes. He emphasizes that for Muslims living in democratic societies, participation in political processes can be a necessity with practical outcomes and benefits.

In the following quote attributed to him, Murat Gezenler compares democracy to Islam, characterizing it as a religion like other preachers do and pointing out that there are significant differences between the two. According to him, Islam bases the source and legitimacy of sovereignty and the authority to legislate not on society, but on the creator (Gezenler, 2021, 00:15:12-00:16:07):

> What is democracy? It is a religion. Islam is a religion. Judaism is another religion. Christianity is another. And democracy is yet another religion. The religion of Islam has its own foundational principles, and so does the religion of democracy. For example, according to Islam, sovereignty belongs solely to Allah. According to

democracy, sovereignty belongs—unconditionally and absolutely—to the people. In Islam, there is only one book to which all servants must submit: the Qur'an. In democracy, all citizens are obliged to follow a different book: the constitution.

Gezenler defines democracy as a competitive "religion" that, in addition to being a secular system of governance, opposes and rejects Islam's understanding of sovereignty. They argue that voting in democracies is a form of ritual "worship" symbolizing the transfer of sovereignty from God to humanity. Gezenler argues that voters deify the parties or leaders they support. This, they argue, suggests that only God has the authority to enact laws, and that voters consider the party or leader they vote for to be a taghut (2021, 00:18:55-00:20:38). From this perspective, even casting a blank ballot risk being considered polytheism, as it signifies accepting the legitimacy of the system.

Gezenler criticizes both those seeking votes in a democratic system and those soliciting votes. According to him, supporting and endorsing individuals who claim to make laws and govern outside of religion and divinity is equivalent to associating partners with God (Gezenler, 2021a, 00:13:00-00:14:48):

> Every election period, people cast their votes for leaders who say, 'Let us govern you in the best way'… By doing so, they are essentially saying, 'Come, be the judge, the ruler, the lawgiver… You decide what is lawful and what is forbidden.' In doing this, they commit shirk by assigning to others the authority that belongs only to Allah. They continue to support those leaders throughout the term… reinforcing this shirk. If someone engages in even one of these two acts—voting for such leaders or calling others to vote for them…—they fall under the category of mushrik (one who associates partners with Allah). They are not Muslims, my brothers… This is the society we live in… millions of people committing shirk against Allah through one or both of these acts.

In general, Gezenler presents a comprehensive critique of democracy based on the incompatibility of democratic participation processes with Islamic teachings. His approach to this issue claims that there is a fundamental conflict between democratic governance, sovereignty, lawmaking, and voting actions and Islamic teachings. His discourse exhibits an approach that pushes individuals and communities participating in democratic processes outside the realm of pure religion.

While Gezenler describes voting as an act of polytheism, Musa Ebu Cafer argues that the democratic system is a political trap designed to pacify Muslims. He argues that the democratic system, in addition to being un-Islamic, is also used as a strategic tool. He argues that the existence of Islamic parties in a democratic system is not a result of pluralistic tolerance, but rather a concern for the perpetuation of the system of blasphemy. Therefore, the legal system has been paved, and a strategy has been implemented to prevent Muslims from organizing any illegal resistance or uprising that could threaten the system. Thus, democracy functions as a mechanism to keep potential dangers under control (2015, 00:07:39-00:15:03).

Musa Ebu Cafer defines the democratic system above as a means of pacifying various anti-system social groups, including Muslim groups. He argues that democratic systems have introduced a kind of 'passive revolution' through various parties to prevent social opposition and maintain control.

In the following quote by Musa Ebu Cafer, he continues to point out the discrepancies between Islamic teachings and democratic participation processes. He claims that in every process involving political parties, there is a conflict between religious principles and divine laws. Another

point he emphasizes is that partisanship is not present in the methodology of the Prophet Muhammad's movement. This approach reflects a typical Salafi perspective on political participation processes (Cafer, 2015, 00:16:45-00:18:10):

> When we analyze these matters, we see that political partisanship is completely contrary to Islam. First and foremost, it contradicts the method of the Messenger of Allah. The Prophet never attempted to establish Islam by coming together with disbelievers or polytheists. He did not join their assemblies, nor did he rule by their laws. On the contrary, he rejected them, opposed them, and struggled against them... Secondly, political parties clearly contradict the nass—the Qur'an and the Sunnah. There are many acts of shirk and kufr involved. From the moment a party is formed, during the election process, and through their activities in parliament, these party members engage in numerous acts of disbelief and association. For instance, from the very beginning, whether in founding a party or entering parliament, they take an oath to uphold the principles and reforms of Atatürk. After entering parliament, they begin to legislate, making laws.

Although Musa Ebu Cafer disapproves of political participation, he emphasizes that, rather than directly positioning those who engage in this act outside of religion, a distinction must be made between the act itself and the status of the individual. While he acknowledges that voting is an act that leads to disbelief because it strengthens an un-Islamic government, he adopts a more cautious and cautious perspective regarding the denunciation of specific individuals. According to him, general provisions of disbelief cannot be directly applied to every voter. He argues that a procedural verification mechanism must be put in place, such as whether the specific conditions necessary for an act of disbelief are met, whether obstacles exist, and whether the act stems from reasons such as ignorance or misinterpretation (2015, 00:21:08-00:23:22).

Similar to Musa Ebu Cafer, Musab Köylüoğlu criticizes the nature of democracy and democratic participation processes. Köylüoğlu, directing his discussion to the internal contradictions within the system, argues that there is a contradiction and incompatibility between the promises of democracy and its practical reality. He argues that the popular sovereignty and freedom promised by democracy have not materialized; on the contrary, freedoms have been restricted. Köylüoğlu questions the validity of the slogan "Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation," particularly in the Turkish context, claiming it to be empty rhetoric. He argues that such a political reality has never been experienced in history (2021, 00:00:48-00:08:54).

In the following quote attributed to him, Köylüoğlu continues to address the relationship between Islam and democracy. He states that some Muslims living in democratic societies have integrated into the system and fully embraced democracy, but on the other hand, they do not question whether democratic principles are compatible with their religious beliefs. He argues that identities like "democratic Muslim" should be absolutely rejected outside of the Muslim identity and that divine laws should be accepted as the constitution (Köylüoğlu, 2021, 00:19:54-00:21:14):

> At this point, brothers, Muslims have reached a stage where, living side by side with democracy, they have come to adopt every aspect of it... They no longer know what to do or how to act in accordance with the Islamic system, nor do they question whether democracy aligns with Islam. In fact, Muslims today construct an identity for themselves within this system... As if being a Muslim were not enough, they now highlight a "democratic" identity as well. Yet a Muslim has only one identity: that he is a Muslim... In conclusion, brothers, any system in which the laws of Allah are not supreme, and in which His rulings are not recognized as the constitutional foundation, cannot be accepted by Islam. And such a system cannot be embraced by Muslims.

In the following quote, Köylüoğlu advises that, for whatever reason, no one in society should be pushed out of Islam and labeled as a non-believer. Instead, he suggests that individuals should be approached with a meaningful and inclusive perspective and that efforts should be made to integrate them into Islam (Köylüoğlu, 2016, 00:9:58-00:10:16):

> I have said it many times: do not declare people disbelievers (takfir) based on suspicion. Do not label people with assumptions. Try to understand them. Try to understand this society. Strive to win their hearts. You will get nowhere by rushing to takfir. Instead, share the beautiful aspects of Islam.

Despite all the anti-democracy comments from both Musab Köylüoğlu and Musa Ebu Cafer, there is no expression in their views about excluding and excommunicating Muslim individuals who participate in democratic processes from the Islamic religion. Those who participate in democratic processes theoretically step outside the Islamic identity, but it can be inferred that they argue for a non-exclusionary and non-stigmatizing approach toward those who engage in this action in practice.

5.2. Salafism and Political Participation on the Youtube Platform: Diversifying Approaches in Türkiye

These religious preachers are united on common ground, which is necessary to state before exploring their approaches to political participation processes in this research. Today, Salafism is addressed under different classifications based on various criteria (Çakmaktaş, 2022, p. 88). The main criterion that causes this classification is the differentiation of religious leaders in religious, political, and social matters. One common stance they share is advocating for the implementation of Sharia law as the ultimate solution to social and political issues. They all believe that the caliphate is the ideal form of political governance and demand a religious administration. Additionally, they all include a structural critique of secularism, democracy, and political parties in their statements, emphasizing the incompatibility of these concepts with Islamic principles. According to Dağcı (2019, p. 137):

> In contemporary Salafi interpretations of religion, which are fragmented into different extremes, the issue of dominance is highly emphasized. This issue encompasses discussions about whether the principles of governance in any state or institution align with divine commands. Therefore, contemporary Salafi groups address the issue of dominance in detail under specific headings in their source texts.

However, their differentiation emerges in the strategies to be followed in the application of ideal Islamic teachings and the Salafi understanding of religion in today's secular state forms and secular societal structures. Some are impatient, domineering, and intolerant, while others exhibit a more flexible, patient, cautious, and tolerant approach.

This study analyzes the theological perspectives and interpretations in the videos of Salafi preachers on YouTube, classifying them into three groups to explore their ideological frameworks. These three groups, called Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism, Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism, and Passive and Conjunctural Salafism, help us see the various opinions and focuses within Salafism. These categories are not rigid; in the contexts mentioned, these preachers' views can sometimes converge. In certain points and contexts of agreement, the influence of the Arab geography can be observed, where Salafism, which emulates the Wahhabi understanding, emerged and developed. Therefore, it can be said that a desert piety has originated from the civilization of the sands, which is fundamental to this ideology (İşcan, 2017, p. 35). Among these groups, there are similarities and differences on various issues. According to Sarmış (2021, p. 437):

The fact that these groups possess different characteristics necessitates the examination of these Salafi movements/groups through multiple classifications." However, we should not overlook the fact that these formations generally possess certain key characteristics. At this point, the most important aspect that should be emphasized in modern Salafi structures is their attitudes and relationship forms concerning conjunctural political structures.

Therefore, ultimately, while they all share the fundamental teachings of Salafism, it is observed that they present them in different ways according to their individual interpretations and priorities. Based on the study's findings, we propose the following classification for Türkiye.

Table 2. The Varied Approaches of Salafism Towards Political Participation in Türkiye in YouTube Sermons

Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism	Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism	Passive and Conjunctural Salafism
Ebu Hanzala (Halis Bayancuk)	Abdullah Yolcu	Musa Ebu Cafer (Musa Olğaç)
Murat Gezenler	Ebu Said Yarbuzi (Mehmet Balcıoğlu)	Musab Köylüoğlu

5.2.1. Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism

Absolute and Exclusionary Salafism, represented by Ebu Hanzala (Halis Bayancuk) and Murat Gezenler, is based on an absolutist and exclusionary mindset that sees its interpretation of religious beliefs as the only valid one. It assumes a clear and unambiguous understanding of religious texts, leaving little room for interpretative flexibility or disagreement. This absolutism and exclusivity extend to all aspects of life, from individual beliefs and practices to social norms and structures. According to Aydınalp (2016a, p. 166), who defines such a thought system as a typology of rejection:

Having failed to continue the old, struggling to accept the new, and seeking their place within the dichotomy of total acceptance or rejection for the construction of an 'authentic' future, the takfiris, who produce discourses that have become arabesque not only 'culturally' but also 'theologically' by filtering through Islamic movements, emerge as a group to be considered within the total rejection typology.

The inherent rigidity of this approach, with a strong emphasis on emulating the Salaf as much as possible, generally leads to a rigid interpretation of Islam that does not bend in any context. This also causes this form of Salafism to share similar characteristics with the group that Demir categorizes as radical Salafism (Demir, 2016).

Ebu Hanzala and Murat Gezenler share similar views regarding their approach to contemporary society. Both of them experience issues with authority and have difficulties settling in the countries they are in (Aydınalp, 2016b, p. 72). These are not the only similarities between the two. As Aydınalp stated, in both preachers, the effort to interpret Islam within a certain ideological framework is quite evident (2015, p. 168). These are not the only similarities between the two. As Aydınalp stated, in both preachers, the effort to interpret Islam within a certain ideological framework is quite evident (2015, p. 168). This type of Salafi perspective significantly impacts society. Absolute and exclusionary Salafism generally appears to be in conflict with social norms in Muslim communities outside of its own religious understanding and in other secular societies. Therefore, this rigid interpretation of Islamic law tends to conflict with more liberal social norms

and legal frameworks, including other religious understandings. This situation is illustrated by the quote from Ebu Hanzala (2018, 1:00:12-1:00:53): "Legitimizing a system of disbelief like democracy in front of people is one of the greatest harms that can be done to this religion of Islam." This clearly excludes the legal frameworks accepted by society. These attitudes and behaviors seem to be in line with the definition of deviance as "anti-social behavior that threatens the norms and values of society." (Slattery, 2020, p. 215). This deviance often manifests itself in various forms of social tension and conflict, typically involving discussions about personal freedoms, gender roles, and religious rights. The absolutist and exclusionary Salafi preachers view this conflict both as a challenge and as proof of the purity of their beliefs. Their confrontational stance places them in Dahrendorf's category of interest and conflict groups. These groups come together within a certain framework of interest, structure, organization, and purpose to aim for social change (Ritzer & Stephisky, 2019, p. 268). According to them, these social conflicts are the result of society deviating from the true path of Islam, and therefore they see their stance as a form of resistance against the corrupting effects of modern and secular society. While they deviate from the norms and values of the current society, they also characterize society as having deviated from authentic religious norms and values. For Ebu Hanzala (2021, 00:00:10-00:00:17): "In democratic systems, especially those who vote, the people are polytheists who associate partners with Allah." According to Becker's theory of deviance, deviant individuals detach from a society dominated by traditional norms and come together with others who share similar deviant tendencies (Waters, 2008, p. 57). In this way, these types of religious groups that come together also alienate themselves from both secular and religious society.

The sermons and speeches of the Salafi preachers representing this category deeply embody the literal interpretation of Islamic texts. For example, as noted in the findings section, according to Murat Gezenler, someone who votes has deviated from God's command in the verse, "Do not associate anything with Me in worship!" Gezenler asserts that this verse is not a metaphor, but rather a literal rule and norm. From his perspective (Gezenler, 2021b, 00:18:55-00:20:38), a person who votes "has made the one they voted for their lord. They have worshipped them. He has made him a tyrant and has associated him with God." This approach becomes evident in the rejection of religious innovations, strict adherence to Islamic teachings, and a strong emphasis on religious purity. The emphasis on religious purity stems from a commitment to the purpose of the religion. A religious ideology with a specific purpose desires to play a primary role in determining all means, rather than achieving this purpose by any means. In line with this purpose, Ebu Hanzala and Murat Gezenler reject democracy and propose an alternative path to change the current political order. Their use of terms like "polytheism," "infidelity system," "religion of democracy," and "voting worship" in connection with participation in democracy, along with their definition of democracy as an alternative religion to Islam and characterization of it as contrary to Islam, indicates their opposition to the current social and political norms and values. According to Aydınalp (2013, p. 31), this system may pose a significant risk of becoming a dangerous tool that could lead to the demonization of ordinary people who are stripped of their Muslim identity and potentially even their extermination when conditions become favorable. For the killing of a person reduced to the status of an apostate will also become obligatory.

Therefore, the views of the preachers possess radical characteristics that could include them in Merton's aforementioned 'rebellion' groups and contain proposals aimed at changing the current social order. The aim of rebellion groups is to reject the cultural goals of the existing society

and the institutionalized means that can be used to achieve these goals and to target social change (Merton, 1968, p. 678). Ebu Hanzala (2019, 00:10:45-00:11:25) expresses that a Muslim's goal should be to bring about Sharia as follows: "If you, as a Muslim today, say, I will bring Allah's Sharia, and I want to participate in elections, God forbid, will anyone include you in the elections? No one will include you in the elections" Especially in situations where a specific purpose, such as the triumph of a particular religious belief or the seizure of political power, is considered crucial, there is a circumstance in which the norms and values of society can be disregarded (Honderich, 2005, p. 246). This level of religious rigidity extends to the followers, who are expected to adhere strictly to the religious norms and practices dictated by these preachers. Any deviation from these norms is considered a serious violation that could potentially lead to exclusion from the religious community. To achieve the goal, alternative solutions outside of Sharia and the caliphate are not adopted, and those who do adopt them are excluded and labeled as infidels.

5.2.2. Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism

Contextual and pragmatic Salafism is represented by Abdullah Yolcu and Ebu Said Yarbuzi (Mehmet Balcıoğlu). The expression 'contextual Salafism' emphasizes that the manifestation of Salafi religious thought and movement is not isolated from its surroundings. This research demonstrates how Salafi ideology interacts with various social, political, and cultural contexts, both influencing and absorbing their influence. The concept of pragmatic Salafism indicates that Salafis strive to closely imitate the religious understanding and practices of Salafism while doing so within the constraints of their contemporary realities. In other words, Salafism is not static; it undergoes change and adapts as it interacts with the multifaceted realities of the modern world. For example, Abdullah Yolcu (2014, 00:18:31-00:19:10) permits the interaction of Salafi thought with political participation only under specific conditions: "But if the intention is to bring about Sharia, to provide Muslims a breather, to open up their paths, then yes, the action is a call. It is worship in its place. It is also jihad, depending on the situation. The scholars speak of it this way." Ebu Said Yarbuzi (2015, 00:17:07-00:18:12) also expresses a similar view: "We would prefer someone who provides satisfactory social services. In other words, we would choose the non-consumer of the people's wealth if we had to pick between two atheists. I am a Belgian citizen. When I have to vote, we prefer the party that offers broader freedom for our beliefs. Whichever one protects our rights, we prefer that one." This approach reveals the conformity strategy developed to cope with the tension between the ideal religious principles of the Salafis and the practical requirements of the modern world. The contextual and pragmatic dimensions of Salafism refer to its approach, which can adapt to various social and cultural contexts and practices and show flexibility when necessary. In this respect, this type of Salafism group appears to be consistent with Demir's classification of 'theological Salafism' (Demir, 2016).

At the center of the contextual and pragmatic approach lies the delicate balance between religious commitment and social integration. Yolcu and Yarbuzi are aware of the inherent challenges of living a religious life in a secular state and a secular contemporary society. This perspective offers an inclusive version of Islam that encourages participation and interaction rather than withdrawal from or rebellion against society. Yolcu (2014, 00:41:12-00:42:14) emphasizes the permissibility of "voting in accordance with religion by using the concept of mustahabb and its classification as a religious duty and responsibility, along with the concepts of wajib and ibadah"

thereby legitimizing participation in democratic processes and aligning with societal norms. Yarbuzi (2019, 00:03:40-00:04:12) states: "However, if we approve of or support someone in this environment, despite their mistakes, it ultimately benefits this religion and Muslims as a whole." With his statement he indicates that supporting certain political actors and parties by adapting to the current social environment can be religiously legitimate due to various benefits. Due to their cultural objectives and the institutionalized tools they employ to achieve these objectives, the views of Yolcu and Yarbuzi can be evaluated under Merton's 'confomity' typology (1938, p. 677). For this reason, this type of Salafism promotes a more dynamic and contextual understanding of Islam that can adapt to and respond to the challenges and demands of contemporary society. We can conclude that the principle of utilitarianism, when combined with pragmatism, serves as the underlying reason (Mill, 2017, p. 28). For this reason, such a religious approach allows Muslims to maintain their religious commitment while integrating into the society they are in, permitting interpretation and adjustment according to social and cultural contexts. Thus, while the fundamental principles of Salafism are preserved, living together in an integrated and harmonious manner with the existing society is made possible according to certain criteria. Such an understanding of Salafism, due to not exhibiting a completely conformist character, rejects the cultural goals of society but accepts its institutional tools, bearing partial similarities to the type of conformity known as 'Ritualism.'

5.2.3. Passive and Conjunctural Salafism

Passive and Conjunctural Salafism, which includes Musa Ebu Cafer (Musa Olğaç) and Musab Köylüoğlu, corresponds to an understanding of how religious doctrines and practices can be applied in a more tolerant and cautious manner. This understanding differs from other strict Salafi approaches that immediately and harshly criticize deviant behaviors against ideal religious teachings and norms, arguing that the reasons behind such practices should be investigated. Musa Ebu Cafer generally claims that this issue of gambling is an act that expels an individual from the religion, but he also allows for exceptions and special contexts in his views on the matter. He emphasizes the duality of action and perpetrator by arguing that not every perpetrator of a forbidden act can be immediately punished. For example, Musa Ebu Cafer (2015, 00:21:08-00:23:22) says:

> But in the case of specific individuals, brothers, I mean in this issue of disbelief, when a person who votes is brought to a specific issue, you know that in matters of excommunication, the conditions and impediments of excommunication are always considered… If we meet the conditions and remove the obstacles, we apply the ruling of takfir. However, if we fail to meet these conditions, we do not apply the excommunication ruling.

Here, the function of the preachers resembles that of a guide who gently leads individuals back to religious obedience through understanding and dialogue, rather than punishment and exclusion. In the understanding of passive and conjunctural Salafism, deviation from religious norms and values is not considered an irreparable violation; rather, individuals are offered new opportunities for learning, development, and reconnecting with religious teachings.

Musa Ebu Cafer equates participation in democratic processes with committing acts of disbelief, thus rejecting participation in democratic processes. Musab Köylüoğlu (2021, 00:19:54-00:21:14) states: "No system that does not uphold God's commandments can be accepted by Muslims" thereby raising an objection to the legitimacy of the democratic system. Thus, both preachers prefer not to participate in the current social and political order. However, these

preachers recommend an interpretative rather than an exclusionary approach to individuals deviating from what they consider the true understanding of Islam. This view can be considered a significant deviation from stricter Salafi interpretations, offering a more inclusive and understanding form of religious practice compared to exclusionary Salafism. Due to their rejection of social and political norms without promoting a rebellion, this type of Salafism, which corresponds to the adaptation type of 'retreat' in Merton's typology (Merton, 1938, p. 677), does not encourage social participation like Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism; instead, it prefers to withdraw from social and political participation. This type of Salafism, in this respect, bears similarities to the 'rebellion groups' typology, but due to certain characteristics it contains, it cannot be fully included in this typology. For this reason, this understanding of Salafism emphasizes the incompatibility of participation in democratic processes with Islam, similar to Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism, but it also seeks to understand the background of such actions and does not engage in as persistent and active an effort to implement an alternative system to democratic processes as other types of Salafism. In absolutist and exclusionary Salafism, opposition to democracy is a primary agenda item, while in passive and conjunctural Salafism, this opposition only emerges in specific contexts.

The interpretative approach adopted by the preachers in the category of Passive and Conjunctural Salafism presents a tolerant form of religious practice. The understanding and tolerance here should not be considered accepting deviations from religious norms and values, but rather as an attempt to understand the reasons and explanations behind the violation of religious norms and values. Musab Köylüoğlu (2016, 00:9:58-00:10:16) expresses this situation as follows: "I have explained it countless times. Do not excommunicate people based on suspicion. Do not label people; do not label them with your suspicions. Try to understand." In this way, while complete adherence to the teachings, norms, and values of the religious doctrine is expected, some exceptions are included in the exclusion mechanism in cases of non-conformity. The causality behind the action is sought, and an approach is adopted in evaluating the behavior of individuals who deviate from the values and norms of religion. Aristotle's concept of the final cause seems explanatory in this regard. The final cause expresses the purpose and aim to which the action is directed (Çaksu, 2002, p. 57). Therefore, we can conclude that the goal of their actions serves as the criterion for excluding others from this category of Salafism. What is meant by empathy is the effort to understand the goal.

The approach of passive and conjunctural Salafism provides a cautious and empathetic stance toward the processes of deviation from Islamic teachings. Unlike the exclusionary and othering approach of Salafism, the takfir mechanism does not take effect immediately; it only activates when certain conditions are met. The fulfillment or imposition of conditions means that the members of this form of Salafism provide necessary warnings, information, and feedback to other out-group members regarding religious violations. This situation is illustrated in the following quote by Musab Köylüoğlu (2016, 00:9:58-00:10:16): "Try to understand this society. Try to win them over. You won't gain anything by declaring others as infidels. Explain the beautiful aspects of Islam."

According to Musa Ebu Cafer (2015, 00:16:45-00:18:10): "This partisanship is completely contrary to Islam." This behavior primarily contradicts the method of the Messenger of Allah." and

(2015, 00:07:39-00:15:03): "The infidel system saw that if Muslims are not dealt with, if they are not given some opportunities, if some concessions are not made to them in certain areas, they will work against us from underground; they will organize." He believes that, like other Salafism types, this one rejects democracy, political parties, and other alternatives. Ultimately, the goal is to establish a state and society based on Sharia and a caliphate. According to Musa Ebu Cafer, the democratic system, referred to as the system of disbelief, tries to prevent this process by granting various rights and freedoms to Muslim individuals and groups.

This form of Salafism does not immediately activate the process of labeling outsiders as 'kafir' (disbelievers) when they adopt or support alternative solutions. The marginalization or stigmatization of those who participate in democratic processes is contingent upon the interaction and interviews conducted with them. This approach is exemplified by Musa Ebu Cafer's (2015, 00:21:08-00:23:22) statement: "In matters of takfir, the conditions and preventives of takfir are always considered" , as well as Musab Köylüoğlu's (2016, 00:9:58-00:10:16) remark: "Try to understand this society. Try to win them over". Therefore, Becker's 'labeling theory' (Waters, 2008, p. 57) is not immediately applied here; rather, it comes into play after multiple interactions and communications and only when deemed necessary.

Figure 1 below visually represents the ideological positioning of Passive and Conjunctural Salafism, which lies between Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism and Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism. This is because this strand of Salafism carries traces of both the inclusiveness and flexibility found in Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism, as well as the exclusivity characteristic of Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism. However, in certain topics and contexts related to modern society, it appears to align closely with Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism—sometimes even adopting the same methods of thought and action entirely. When the ideological positions of these types of Salafism on political participation are evaluated alongside their patterns of adaptation, the sources of their orientations become more comprehensible.

Figure 1. Interconnected Patterns of Salafi Approaches to Political Participation in the Turkish Context
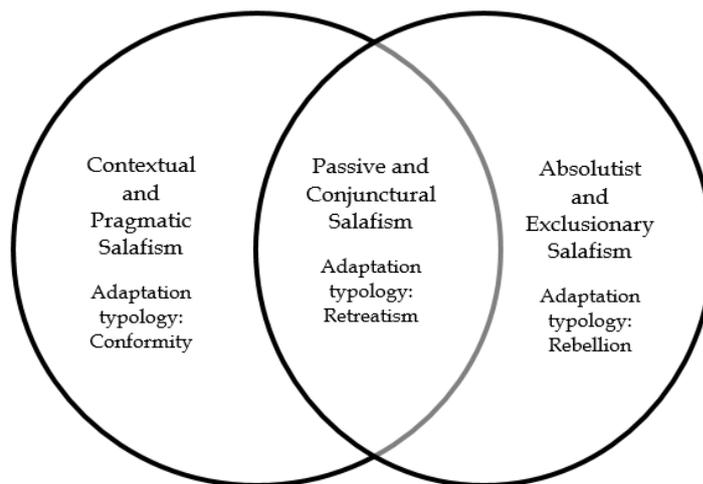
Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout this research, Salafi religious ideologies have been evaulated in depth through the categories of Absolutist and Exclusionary Salafism, Contextual and Pragmatic Salafism, and Passive and Conjunctural Salafism. In doing so, this study aims to contribute to the development of various insights and conceptual frameworks regarding the multifaceted nature of Salafism and its dynamic interaction with diverse socio-political contexts, individual perceptions, and religious interpretations.

The qualitative analysis of these three identified categories of Salafism highlights the significant diversity within the Salafi movement. As this research demonstrates, although Salafism may appear externally as a homogeneous structure—largely due to the reactive and radical attitudes of some groups—religious groups cannot always be understood as monolithic entities. Instead, Salafism should be more accurately described as a spectrum of beliefs and practices shaped by the socio-cultural and political environments in which they exist and influenced by various interpretations and adaptations. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the necessity of resisting reductive classifications and instead recognizing the internal diversity within the Salafi religious movement. A holistic understanding of Salafism can only be achieved by acknowledging its multidimensional structure and the diversity of interpretations and practices that may differ across different preachers and religious groups. This, in turn, challenges static and rigid perceptions of religion and religious groups and reveals the dynamic and context-dependent nature of religious beliefs. Supporting this argument, the present study demonstrates how different interpretations of Salafism can coexist within the same social and political context. These findings suggest that religious belief systems are capable of adaptation—or resistance—when necessary or required.

When the data included in this study are evaluated through the lens of Merton's concept of anomie and his adaptation typology, it becomes clear that Salafism in the Turkish context adopts different strategies of adaptation regarding democratic processes and political participation. In other words, the culturally defined goals of Turkish society and the institutionally legitimized means to achieve them have led to the emergence of various Salafi perspectives. In these differing perspectives, Salafism at times approaches societal norms and means, while at other times it distances itself. Such approaches—whether involving engagement or withdrawal—can either offer an opportunity to foster social peace and cohesion or, conversely, result in social unrest, tension, and anomie. Those interpretations of Salafism that generate tension and anomie seek to establish a new normative and political order and persistently pursue this goal. Therefore, in certain contexts, Salafism must be viewed not only as a religious movement but also as a political actor who poses a challenge to the existing political system.

This study focused on YouTube videos by various Salafi preachers concerning political participation and social integration. It may be inferred that these preachers are gaining new followers and adherents through the use of new media tools. Observations suggest that these preachers are more widely recognized through their online videos than through in-person interactions. Given the attention they receive on digital platforms, they can even be considered social media influencers. An influencer is someone with a large following who can shape their audience's interests and preferences. Therefore, once recognized through social media, these

Salafi influencers may attract followers who wish to meet them in person. This tendency is observable in their interactions with followers in their video content. Initially reached through social media, followers and sympathizers may later meet in person and become part of their organizational structure. These followers, once integrated into the preacher's team, may begin to adopt that preacher's system of thought. As a result, followers might be influenced not only in their attitudes toward the social and political order but also in their religious thinking, practices, and everyday social interactions.

Although there are various and distinct interpretations and manifestations of Salafism, it is important to note that all Salafi groups share a claim to possess the sole and authentic truth. Whether rigid or flexible in approach, each Salafi group ultimately asserts that it represents the true Islam. The fundamental difference lies in whether, and how, this claimed truth is imposed on the rest of society. The way in which the truth is imposed on others determines the Salafi movement's stance toward alternative viewpoints. Making a claim to truth can lead to tension or conflict with social consensus and political order. Such tensions may manifest in the short or long concept and have varying degrees of impact within society. In this context, future studies on Salafism in Türkiye should go beyond purely theological analysis and incorporate evaluations based on the new media ecology and the broader socio-political context. Interdisciplinary research in this area can provide more comprehensive and reliable data. Research on how Salafi groups use new media—now a major force in shaping public discourse—can raise awareness both in academic circles and in public opinion. This awareness can, in turn, support the development of effective public policies aimed at reducing tension, enhancing social cohesion, and fostering integration.

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MEDİAD

Siyasal Katılım, Demokrasi ve Sosyal Uyum Açısından Selefiliğin YouTube'daki Söylemleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Mevlüt UĞURLU[*]

Genişletilmiş Özet

Amaç ve Kapsam

Günümüzde yeni medya araçlarının hızlı gelişimi, iletişim ve bilgi akışını derinden etkilemiş ve dönüştürmüştür. Bu sürecin birçok toplumsal kurumu yapısal olarak etkilediği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu etkinin görüldüğü kurumlardan biri de dindir. Din ile yeni medya arasındaki etkileşim gelişme göstermiş ve bunun sonucunda dini gruplar görüşlerini topluma yaymak için yeni ve etkili bir araç olan yeni medyayı benimsemiştir. Böylelikle bu gruplar ideolojilerini toplumun geniş kesimlerine daha etkili bir şekilde aktarma imkânı bulmuştur. Bu dini gruplardan biri olan Selefi gruplar, dijital platformların sunduğu imkânlardan faydalanarak toplumsal zemin kazanma ve düşünsel yayılma fırsatlarını değerlendirmeye başlamışlardır. Selefilik, İslam'ın ilk üç neslinde yaşayan Müslümanların görüşlerinin günümüzde birebir uygulanmasını savunan bir dini yaklaşımdır. Bu görüşe göre "selef" olarak adlandırılan ilk nesil Müslümanlar, inanç ve ibadet açısından örnek alınması gereken kuşaktır. Günümüzde Selefilik, grup içinde ön plana çıkan, belli bir karizmatik otoritesi olan, hitabeti güçlü vaizler tarafından temsil edilmektedir. Selefi gruplar yeni medya araçlarında görünür olarak farklı konulardaki görüşlerini dijital vaizler aracılığıyla geniş kitlelere aktarmaya başlamıştır. Bu çerçevede dijital platformlar, birer iletişim aracı olmanın ötesine geçerek aynı zamanda dini mesajların inşa edildiği ve yeniden üretildiği alanlara dönüşmüştür. Böylece bu süreç, İslam'ın saf hâline duyulan özlem ile toplumun norm ve değerleri arasında bir gerilim ve anomi ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Yeni medyanın dinî aktörler tarafından bu şekilde araçsallaştırılması, geleneksel dinî otoritelerin geniş kitlelere ulaşabilmek için dijital mecralarda da varlık göstermeye yönelmesine neden olmuştur.

Yöntem

Hilafetin ve şeriatın toplumsal yapı ve yönetim biçimi olarak benimsenmesi gerektiğini savunan bu dini yaklaşım, etkileşim içinde olduğu modern ve seküler toplumsal-siyasal düzenle çeşitli gerilimler yaşayabilmektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye bağlamında Selefi dini grupların siyasal amaçlarını anlamayı ve bu amaçlara ulaşmak için benimsedikleri yolları ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma yöntemi ve tasarımı olarak durum çalışması kullanılan bu araştırmada, YouTube'da vaaz veren altı Selefi vaizin videoları veri kaynağı olarak kullanılmıştır.

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[*] Arş. Gör. Dr., Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi, e-mail: mevlutugurlu@nevsehir.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-5860-9543, Nevşehir, Türkiye

Videolar araştırmanın amacı ve sorularına bağlı olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu amaçla demokrasi ve siyasi partilerle ilgili videolar doküman incelemesi tekniğiyle derlenmiş, deşifre edilerek tematik analiz yöntemiyle kodlanmış ve çeşitli temalara ayrılarak araştırmanın bulguları elde edilmiştir. Araştırmada kullanılan veri seti, özellikle din-siyaset ilişkisine dair doğrudan söylemleri barındıran içeriklerden seçilmesine dikkat edilmiştir. Kodlama sürecinde her vaizin yaklaşım tarzını nesnel biçimde tespit edebilmek amacıyla içerikler kavramsal düzeyde yorumlanmıştır. Ek olarak, verilerin analiz sürecinde sosyal teori bağlamında tartışabilmek için Merton'un anomi kuramı ve uyum tipolojisi gibi kavramsal araçlara yer verilmiştir.

Bulgular

Bu çalışmada Selefi vaizlerin görüşlerini literatürde mevcut bir sınıflandırmayla ilişkilendirmeye çalışmaktan ziyade verilerden edilen bulgulara dayalı olarak yeni ve özgün bir sınıflandırma ortaya koyma yoluna gidilmiştir. Bu amaçla çalışmanın bulguları üç ana kategori altında toplanmıştır. Bunlar Mutlakçı ve Dışlayıcı Selefilik, Bağlamsal ve Pragmatik Selefilik, Pasif ve Konjonktürel Selefilik olarak belirlenmiştir. Her bir kategori, ilgili Selefilik türünün karşılık geldiği bulgular, kuram ve kavramlar ile desteklenmiştir.

Mutlakçı ve Dışlayıcı Selefilik, kendi dini anlayışından farklı bir anlayışı benimseyen ve demokratik süreçlere katılan bireyleri dini terk etmekle ve dışlamakla etiketlemektedir. Bu yaklaşım Ebu Hanzala (Halis Bayancuk) ve Murat Gezenler tarafından temsil edilmektedir. Her bağlamda İslam'ın katı ve esnek olmayan yönünü temsil eder. Bu yönüyle radikal Selefilik olarak da adlandırılabilir. İçinde bulunduğu toplumsal ve siyasal sistemle sıklıkla çatışma halindedir. Kendi dini anlayışı dışındaki dini ve kültürel norm ve değerleri reddeder. Bu anlayışa göre toplumun neredeyse tamamı şirk içerisindedir ve yeniden iman edip İslam'a girmeleri gerekmektedir. Bu tür dışlayıcı bir Selefi yaklaşım, demokratik temsiliyeti dinen uygun bulmazken, kendi düşünsel yaklaşımını ve pratiklerini tek doğru yol ve hakikat olarak sunmaktadır.

Bağlamsal ve Pragmatik Selefilik ise Mutlakçı ve Dışlayıcı Selefiliğin aksine, mevcut toplumsal ve siyasal yapılarla uyum içinde olmayı ve inançlı bireylerin menfaatini gözeterek demokratik süreçlere katılımı savunmaktadır. Bu Selefilik anlayışı, mevcut sosyal ve siyasal düzenle çatışmak yerine pragmatik bir yaklaşımla uyum sağlamayı önermektedir. Bu nedenle mevcut sosyal ve kültürel yapıyla uyumlu bir karakter sergiler. Dini aidiyet kadar toplumsal bütünleşme de dikkate alınır. Bu nedenle modern toplumdan izole bir yaşam tarzı benimsenmez. Bu tür kapsayıcı bir yaklaşımı benimseyen Selefi vaizler, toplumu tamamen reddetmek yerine, toplumsal düzen içerisinde belli bir dereceye kadar İslami değerlerin yaşatılabileceğini iddia etmektedirler. Dolayısıyla bu tür bir yaklaşım, hem dini hem de dünyevi arasında bir denge oluşturma çabası içerisindedir.

Pasif ve Konjonktürel Selefilik, bu iki Selefilik türünün ortasında yer almakta; mevcut seküler ve modern toplumdan ve demokratik süreçlerden geri çekilmekte ancak Mutlakçı ve Dışlayıcı Selefilik kadar bu süreçlere katılan bireyleri sert biçimde eleştirmemekte ve kınamamaktadır. Bu tür bir Selefilik biçimi, daha çok bireysel takvayı sürdürme ve dini korunma gibi stratejileri yansıtmakta olup doğrudan siyasi müdahaleden kaçınarak toplumda varlık göstermeye çalışmaktadır. İslam'ın siyasal tercihlerine aykırı görüşlere eleştirel bir mesafe ve düşünsel duruşa sahip olmakla birlikte, bu tür söylemler toplumsal gerilim üretme potansiyelini oldukça sınırlı düzeyde içermektedir.

Bu çalışmada her bir Selefilik kategorisi Merton'un uyum tipolojilerinden birisi ile özdeşleştirilmiştir. Mutlakçı ve Dışlayıcı Selefilik 'isyan' tipolojisi, Bağlamsal ve Pragmatik Selefilik 'uyum' ve 'şekilcilik' tipolojisi, Pasif ve Konjonktürel Selefilik ise 'geri çekilme' tipolojisi ile özdeşleşirken, 'isyan' grupları tipolojisiyle de benzerlikler gösterebilmektedir.

Sonuç

Bu çalışmada ortaya konan Selefilik kategorileri birbirinden farklılaşırken diğer taraftan bazı konularda ortak söylem, amaç ve stratejilere sahip olabilmektedir. Aralarındaki farklılıklar Selefiliğin heterojen doğasını yansıtmakta ve Selefi dini anlayışın yekpare bir yapı olmadığını, düşünsel olarak farklı gruplara ayrılabileceğini göstermektedir. Her kategori, Türkiye bağlamında Selefi grupların siyasal hedefleri ve bu hedeflere ulaşmak için seçtikleri yollar açısından ne kadar farklılaşabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları, Selefiliğin çok katmanlı yapısının altını çizmekte ve aynı toplum ve kültür içerisinde dahi Selefi grupların farklı dini yorum ve pratiklere sahip olabileceğini göstermektedir. Bu çeşitlilik, Selefilik üzerine yapılacak araştırmaların tek bir kuramsal çerçeveye sıkıştırılamayacağını, çok boyutlu analizlerin gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Zira görüldüğü üzere, aynı dine ait marjinal bir yaklaşım bile kendi içerisinde birçok konuda farklılaşabilmektedir.

Yeni medya araçları üzerinden kamuya açık şekilde paylaşılan Selefi vaiz videolarındaki temaların ayrıntılı analizi, Türkiye'deki Selefi grupların ideolojik ve siyasal çeşitliliğini anlamak açısından önemli bir kaynak sunmaktadır. Bu yönüyle çalışma, Türkiye'de Selefiliğin dinamikleri ve yapısını derinlemesine kavramak isteyen araştırmacılar, akademisyenler ve politika yapıcılar için bir kaynak işlevi görmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu bağlamda, dijital platformların sadece dini içeriklerin toplumda yayılmasında değil, aynı zamanda Selefi aktörlerin yeni medya araçları aracılığıyla toplumsal görünürlük kazanmasında da kritik bir rol oynadığı söylenebilir. Elde edilen veri seti, alandaki çağdaş dini gruplar üzerine yapılacak gelecekteki araştırmalar için bir temel oluşturarak bilgi birikiminin derinleştirilmesine katkı sağlayabilir. Bu araştırmanın konusuna benzer çalışmalar, toplumsal uyumun güçlendirilmesi ve dini çeşitliliğin barışçıl biçimde toplumda yer alması ve yönetilmesi açısından kamu politikalarına da bir çerçeve oluşturabilir.