

A Study on the Reactions of Turkish YouTube Users to Migration and Migrant Issues

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the discourses of YouTube users in Turkey regarding migration and immigrant issues, thereby revealing the ideological attitudes and societal perceptions propagated on social media. Specifically, it examines how the economic, cultural, and security-based impacts of increased migration flows following the Syrian civil war are articulated on digital platforms. In the study, comments posted beneath four YouTube videos were subjected to thematic analysis using the MAXQDA software, after which exemplary comments that best reflected the identified themes were evaluated in depth through critical discourse analysis. This methodological approach seeks to decipher the meaning structures individuals construct around migration, as well as their cultural and identity-related concerns and perceptions of the state. The findings indicate that the majority of comments (69%) contain explicitly anti-immigrant discourses. The most prevalent themes include the socio-economic effects of migration (40.42%), calls for collective action and anxieties about the future (37.29%), and perceived security and cultural threats (30.50%). Migrants are frequently framed as “invaders,” “burdens,” or “threats,” with these expressions reinforced by nationalist and conservative discourses. Distrust toward the state and political authority, societal passivity, and perceived threats to national identity emerge prominently in the comments. On the other hand, only 1% of the comments reflect a humanitarian and empathetic perspective toward migrants, yet these discourses remain marginalized against the dominant narrative. These findings underscore the prevalence of anti-immigration discourses on social media and its potential to deepen societal polarization.

Keywords: Migration, Immigrant, Migration and Immigrant Problem, YouTube User, Discourse Analysis.

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Türk Youtube Kullanıcılarının Göç ve Göçmen Sorunlarına Verdikleri Tepkiler Üzerine Bir Araştırma

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki YouTube kullanıcılarının göç ve göçmenlik meselelerine dair söylemlerini analiz etmeyi amaçlamakta, böylece sosyal medyada üretilen ideolojik tutumları ve toplumsal algıları ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Özellikle, Suriye iç savaşının ardından artan göç hareketlerinin ekonomik, kültürel ve güvenlik temelli etkilerinin dijital mecralarda nasıl dile getirildiği incelenmektedir. Çalışmada, dört YouTube videosunun altına yapılan yorumlar MAXQDA yazılımı aracılığıyla tematik analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiş, ardından belirlenen temaları en iyi yansıtan örnek yorumlar eleştirel söylem analizi yoluyla derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Bu yöntemsel yaklaşım, bireylerin göç olgusuna dair oluşturdukları anlam yapılarının yanı sıra kültürel ve kimlik temelli kaygılarını ve devlete ilişkin algılarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, yorumların büyük çoğunluğu (%69) açıkça göçmen karşıtı söylemler içermektedir. En sık rastlanan temalar arasında göçün sosyo-ekonomik etkileri (%40,42), toplumsal eylem çağrıları ve geleceğe dair kaygılar (%37,29) ile güvenlik ve kültürel tehdit algısı (%30,50) öne çıkmaktadır. Göçmenler sıklıkla “istilacı”, “yük” veya “tehdit” olarak çerçevelenmekte, bu ifadeler milliyetçi ve muhafazakâr söylemlerle pekiştirilmektedir. Devlete ve siyasi otoriteye yönelik güvensizlik, toplumsal edilgenlik ve ulusal kimliğe yönelik tehdit algısı yorumlarda belirgin bir şekilde yer almaktadır. Öte yandan, göçmenlere insani ve empatik bir bakış açısı sunan söylemler yalnızca %1 oranında yer bulmakta ve baskın anlatı karşısında azınlıkta kalmaktadır. Bu bulgular, sosyal medyada göçmen

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karşıtı söylemlerin yaygınlığını ve bunun toplumsal kutuplaşmayı derinleştirme potansiyelini gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, Göçmen, Göç ve Göçmen Sorunu, YouTube Kullanıcısı, Söylem Analizi.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is an unstoppable human mobility phenomenon. The increasing proportion of migrants within the world population over time confirms this reality. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2024 report, the number of international migrants has significantly increased over the past 50 years, reaching approximately 300 million people by 2024, accounting for 3.6% of the global population, who live outside their country of birth. For this reason, numerous international agreements have been established aiming both to facilitate and regulate migration. Migration is desired because developed countries require labor supply (Ruhs & Anderson 2012; Bagavos 2023). On the other hand, it needs to be controlled as excessive migration may harm countries' social, cultural, and economic structures (Eberl et al. 2018; IOM 2020; Guzhev & Semenova 2021). Maintaining a balanced number of migrants is essential for the prosperity of countries.

Turkey is one of the countries striving to maintain this balance and consequently facing various challenges. The issue of migration and migrants in Turkey has become particularly salient after the Syrian war. This is largely due to Turkey's open-door policy, which led to a massive influx of Syrians entering the country as guests without preventive measures. Initially, Syrians were perceived as guests due to the war (Çankal & Koyuncu 2025; Bimay & Jomma 2024). However, as their numbers increased, the perception of guesthood gradually diminished. Especially parallel to worsening economic conditions, migrants were scapegoated by the public as the root cause of problems, leading to their exclusion and othering (Diker & Karan 2021; Lortoğlu 2017; Danış 2018). Both the unfavorable socioeconomic conditions and the resurgence of nationalist ideology within society deepened migration-related issues. Consequently, the public began to perceive Syrians as threats not only socially and culturally but also in terms of their use of public spaces and access to services (Ekici 2019; 2025).

The perception of migration and migrants as threats is expressed through public reactions. These reactions manifest through various protests and demonstrations, media discourse, and continuously on social media platforms. In Turkey, migrants remain a persistent topic of discussion, especially on social media. Therefore, within the scope of this study,

thematic and discourse analyses were conducted on comments under four YouTube videos addressing migration and migrant issues in Turkey. The aim was to uncover the underlying meanings, ideological attitudes, and social, cultural, and identity-based perspectives reflected in social media users' responses to migration and migrant problems.

This study, which addresses the reflections of migration and immigrant debates in Turkey on social media platforms, makes a significant contribution to the literature both methodologically and substantively. While other some social media platforms have frequently been examined in terms of refugee discourse, YouTube's vast user base and its comment-driven interactive structure have been largely neglected in this context. Moving from this gap, the thematic and critical discourse analysis conducted on YouTube comments not only reveals the structural and ideological foundations of anti-immigrant discourses but also demonstrates how these discourses are intertwined with social polarization and identity crisis. Unlike the existing literature, this research is not limited to media representations or policy analyses; by deeply examining societal reactions and collective mental structures through direct user-generated content, it offers an original perspective on how digital platforms shape and normalize migration debates.

Migration and Migrant Issues in Turkey

It is possible to define the current era of the modern world as the age of migration. Indeed, the highest number of migrants in history currently live today. However, a high volume of migration does not necessarily mean that people from different cultures recognize and assimilate each other. The increase in migration brings with it numerous challenges, primarily social, cultural, and economic problems. Due to disparities in development levels among countries in Europe, America, and other continents, discriminatory interventions and political attitudes toward migrants, especially those coming from countries often labeled as the Third World, persist in order to maintain these differences. It is evident that problems arising between migrants and native populations are more strongly felt in nation-state structured countries (Apap et al. 2019; Eberl et al. 2018). This is because the native population's desire to preserve national culture and identity, increasing economic difficulties, and a resurging fear of becoming a minority in society intensify negative attitudes toward migrants.

For Turkey, located on the migration route between Asia and Europe, migration and migrants have always been significant national concerns. Among countries hosting refugees and irregular migrants crossing borders uncontrolled, Turkey has been a primary destination, especially following the Syrian war. After the onset of the Syrian conflict, Turkey's migration

corridor has ranked among the world's busiest. According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) 2024 report, the corridor from Mexico to the United States, with approximately 11 million migrants, is the largest in the world. The second largest corridor is from the Syrian Arab Republic to Turkey, composed predominantly of refugees displaced by the internal conflict in Syria. Turkey has become one of the countries hosting the largest number of migrants worldwide, especially as a compulsory transit country for Syrian refugees. In 2014, when the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) began to control the region, over 1.5 million Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey that year alone, reaching three million within two years (Directorate General of Migration Management 2025). Consequently, Turkey became the country hosting the largest refugee population globally at that time (UNHCR Global Trends 2014).

Although systematic integration policies were not implemented in Turkey between the 1980s and 2010s, some "top-down" or "tentative" integration efforts have been initiated recently, supported by European Union funds, following the arrival of Syrians (Ünsal & Sertkaya-Doğan 2024). Since 2011, Turkey has managed the integration of Syrian refugees by focusing on factors such as age groups, cultural and linguistic similarities, and access to the labor market to preserve social balance. Nevertheless, political polarization, economic crises, and increasing discrimination and racism in Turkey have diminished the country's capacity for acceptance and integration (Coşkun & Ateş 2023; Danış & Dikmen 2022). Studies indicate that the perception of refugees as temporary visitors who will eventually return to their home countries has weakened integration policies and their implementation. Additionally, the sudden influx of millions of Syrians shocked Turkey's preparedness, and the insufficiency of national policies and resources for such a large refugee and migrant population has hindered social cohesion and integration efforts (Bahcekapili & Çetin 2015).

Bureaucratic and legal obstacles, alongside the lack of educational opportunities, constitute significant challenges to the social cohesion and integration of refugees and migrants. Topal Demiroğlu's (2024) study shows that bureaucratic delays, inefficiencies, and additional burdens negatively impact refugees' identity formation and societal integration, with ongoing struggles leading to feelings of marginalization and alienation. Similarly, Almasri's (2023) research reveals that despite informal strategies limiting access and using Afghan migrants in Turkey as cheap labor, they face security threats such as deportation, and access to international protection remains inaccessible. The lack of formal policies, legal gaps, and implementation

issues push these groups into irregular status, marginalizing them and disrupting social cohesion and integration processes.

Education of Syrian refugees is another critical issue within integration policies. School-aged children are generally the main target of educational efforts. Since a significant proportion of Syrians seeking asylum in Turkey are women and children, the education of young refugees is especially important. Therefore, integrating refugee and migrant children into the education system is essential. Studies focus both on the difficulties Syrian refugees face in education and on the attitudes of the native population toward refugees. Both perspectives are critical for successful integration. According to Aytaç (2021), the most common problems Syrian students face relate to adapting to the education system, psychological issues, language education, and teacher relationships. Moreover, native students' attitudes toward refugees and their social acceptance levels influence the integration process. Aktan's (2022) research indicates that refugee students are most accepted by primary school students, less by middle school students, and least by high school students. Social acceptance decreases with increasing age. This trend is observable both within educational levels (Ablak 2020; Yalçın 2023) and in broader society (Ekici 2019).

Another significant issue within migration-related problems is the recent economic deterioration in the country and the attribution of economic decline to migrants. Ineffective implementation of economic policies has disrupted migrant labor markets. Debates in Turkey revolve around both the presence of migrants in the labor market and their alleged negative economic impact. Some studies (Kaya & Aydın 2021) suggest that Syrian refugees in Turkey do not harm the economy in the short term but may have negative effects in the long term. Conversely, other research (e.g., Mahia et al. 2019) indicates that Syrian refugees positively contribute approximately 2% to GDP in the short term and up to 4% in the long term. It is important to note that there are limited studies clearly demonstrating migrants' and refugees' significant impact on economic decline. However, especially following the rise in inflation rates in Turkey, economic problems have led political circles, media platforms, and public opinion to regard migrants as an economic burden. Notably, social media platforms like YouTube and X have amplified narratives portraying foreigners as the root cause of crises and problems, significantly influencing public sentiment. According to Beck (2009), if a group represents a risk, the collective perception reduces the group to that risk alone, overshadowing other characteristics. From Beck's perspective, migrants and refugees being labeled as economic burdens, invaders, and criminals in media and society reflects a representation of risk.

Syrian migrants are also debated in the media and political arena concerning security and crime (Doğanay & Çoban Keneş 2016; Yıldırım Başoğlu 2023). False or distorted media reports about migrants' involvement in crime foster public perceptions that migrants are prone to criminal behavior (Kızmaz 2018). Such reports and rumors occasionally carry the risk of inciting social or ethnic conflicts. Studies by Altun (2023), based on criminal records, and Kayaoğlu (2022) reveal that much of this discourse and media coverage is largely unfounded. The role of digital platforms in spreading misinformation and hate speech contributes to the normalization of anti-migrant discourses (Komendantova et al. 2023; Lakzaei et al. 2024). Consequently, migrants worldwide are increasingly viewed as social risks and crises (Fröhlich 2023), a perspective that is similarly reflected in the general societal outlook in Turkey.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design. The rationale for using this model lies in its ability to provide an in-depth analysis of individuals' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as to uncover underlying meanings that cannot be captured through quantitative data (Neuman 2016; Merriam 2013).

Data were collected through the *document analysis technique*, which is one of the qualitative data collection methods. The collected data were subjected to *thematic analysis* using the MAXQDA software, followed by *discourse analyses* of selected comments under each identified theme.

Document Review Information

Table: 1. Documents

Documents	Document Name	Document Link	Publication Date	Access Date
1. Video	Türkiye göçmenleri geri gönderebilir mi? (<i>Can Turkey send migrants back?</i>)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddl-iaw0sjU&t=215s	02.03.2024	12.01.2025
2. Video	Büyüteç: Türkiye'nin göç krizi I Buraya nasıl geldik ve şimdi ne olacak? (<i>Magnifying glass: Turkey's migration crisis I How did we get here and what will happen now?</i>)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yc82W8Qsykc	02.09.2022	03.01.2025

3. Video	Göçmenler ve mülteciler: Bir dış politika konusu nasıl kent sorununa dönüştü? (<i>Migrants and refugees: How did a foreign policy issue become an urban problem?</i>)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juaouOskNG4	23.03.202 4	15.01.202 5
4. Video	Türkiye'nin büyüyen sorunu: Sığınmacılar (<i>Turkey's growing problem: Refugees</i>)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDNMaPuUmCM	01.06.202 4	27.01.202 5

User comments posted under the YouTube video documents described above (Table 1) were downloaded as text files. Four videos related to migrant and immigrant issues in Turkey were selected, and after transcribing the comments posted under these videos, they were subjected to thematic analysis using the MAXQDA-20 software. The total number of comments under these videos was determined to be 7,113. The number of comments remaining after the filtering processes is as follows.

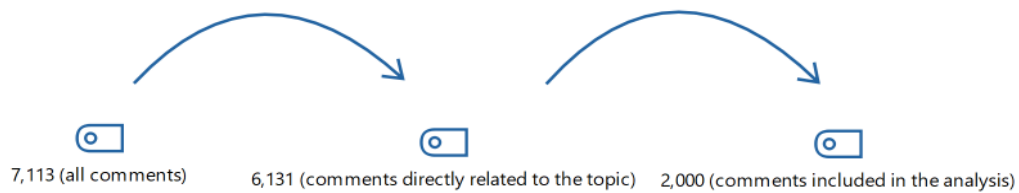


Figure: 1. Number of Comments - Maxqda Code Distribution Model

After the filtering process, a total of 2,000 comments representing a sample of 6,131 comments were selected for thematic analysis. These comments were subjected to thematic analysis using the MAXQDA software. Subsequently, key comments best representing each theme were analyzed using discourse analysis techniques. Graphical and statistical data analyses (such as charts and word clouds presented in the findings) were conducted based on the full set of 6,131 comments. However, only the 2,000 comments selected as the sample were considered for the thematic analysis.

Data Collection Process

The data corpus consists of public user comments posted under YouTube videos related to migration and immigrant issues in Turkey. YouTube serves as a digital public sphere where users freely express ideological orientations and cultural anxieties, making it a valuable context

for the study of everyday discourse (Lange 2007; Kovala et al. 2020). Four videos were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- The video directly addresses migration- or immigration-related themes in Turkey (e.g., border control, refugee integration, asylum policies, socio-economic impacts),
- It has a significant number of views and user comments to ensure rich data (It has over 100,000 views and at least 1,000 user comments),
- It reflects a range of perspectives and covers economic, cultural, and political dimensions of migration.

The selected videos were published between 2022 and 2024 by various media outlets and independent content creators, ensuring variation in tone and narrative framing (see Table 1). As YouTube videos are publicly available platforms, obtaining consent was not deemed necessary for ethical considerations. Moreover, no specific personal information regarding the identities of the users posting comments has been included.

Comment Extraction and Pre-processing

All user comments from the selected videos were scraped using a third-party YouTube comment extraction tool and exported in .txt format. Comments were then imported into MAXQDA-20 software for qualitative coding and analysis. A multistep filtering process was applied:

a) Data Cleaning: Spam messages, emoji-only posts, and non-linguistic content (e.g., links, hashtags, broken text) were removed.

b) Relevance Filtering: Only comments that directly or indirectly referenced migration-related content were retained.

c) Duplicate Removal: Repetitive content or copy-pasted messages were eliminated to reduce bias.

d) Language Standardization: Only comments in Turkish were included.

After filtering, a total of 6,131 comments formed the final corpus. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure thematic saturation (Guest et al. 2006), capturing the diversity of user perspectives, emotional intensities, and ideological positions.

Thematic Analysis

The first analytical phase consisted of a thematic analysis of the comment dataset, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model:

a) Familiarization: The researcher read the entire dataset repeatedly to gain familiarity with emerging patterns.

b) Initial Coding: Open coding was conducted using MAXQDA, identifying significant semantic units across the dataset (e.g., “işsizlik (unemployment)”, “güvenlik tehdidi (security threat)”, “kültürel yozlaşma (cultural decay)”).

c) Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories to form preliminary themes.

d) Theme Review: Thematic boundaries were refined and overlapping codes were reassigned where necessary.

e) Theme Definition and Naming: Each theme was clearly defined and labeled based on its core narrative logic.

f) Reporting: Each theme was contextualized with representative quotes and visual outputs (word clouds, code trees, descriptive statistics).

This process resulted in six main themes, highlighting the dominant concerns expressed by users (e.g., socio-economic impacts, security threats, national identity crisis, political distrust).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of analysis aimed at revealing the underlying meanings, intentions, and ideological thoughts embedded within utterances or texts (Machin & Mayr 2023; van Leeuwen 2006). Rather than simply uncovering the phonetic and syntactic features of a language, CDA focuses on the meanings underlying words or sentences. The meanings unveiled often aim to expose a social reality (Van Dijk 2002; 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that discourse analysis serves the purpose of uncovering the underlying truth behind expressions in texts and speech.

Within the scope of this study, CDA was employed to reveal the social and ideological realities underlying the YouTube comments analyzed. After selecting specific comments that best represent the identified themes, discourse analysis was conducted on these comments. The

implied meanings, ideological perspectives, and intended ideas beneath the selected sentences were explored.

During the discourse analysis, expressions at the word and sentence levels, repetitions within the texts, and particularly emphasized phrases were examined. The discourse analysis was conducted based on the techniques outlined in the following theoretical framework.

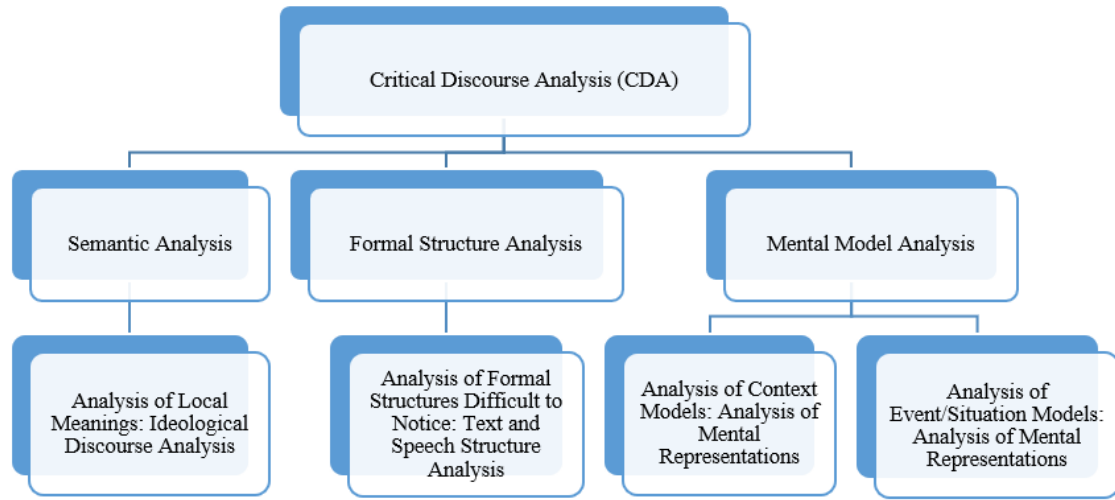


Figure: 2. Dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis

The dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis were developed by the researcher drawing on the works of Van Dijk (2002; 2006; 2008), and Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983). Comments best representing the themes obtained through thematic analysis were selected and analyzed according to the discourse analysis dimensions outlined above. The explanation of each discourse analysis dimension is as follows:

Analysis of Local Meanings (Ideological Discourse Analysis): The aim of this analysis is to reveal the directly or indirectly expressed meanings, propositions, inter-propositional relations, and coherence within the discourse. It is important to uncover implicit or hidden meanings and ideologically biased discourses, particularly polarizing expressions that represent “us” versus “them.”

Analysis of Formal Structures Difficult to Notice (Text and Speech Structure Analysis -Repetitions, Emphasis-): This analysis focuses on identifying the formal structures of dominant discourses that may go unnoticed in sentences due to the excessive use of certain expressions that align with the social structure and ideology of the discourse while concealing realities, and the deliberate removal or passive use of opposing expressions.

Analysis of Context and Event/Situation Models (Mental Representations Analysis): According to Van Dijk (2002; 2006), the subjective mental models that people reflect in their discourse related to specific events and situations serve as an interface for uncovering social representations such as knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies connected to the structures of groups and organizations (social structures).

Like context models, event/situation models are mental representations stored in episodic memory/long-term memory where individuals store knowledge and views about events they have experienced or read/heard about (Van Dijk & Kintsch 1983). Language users' interpretive or descriptive modes in mental context models, appropriate to the characteristics of the communicative event, govern and constrain the text and speech. Through context and event/situation models, individuals adapt discourse to the communicative event and social environment in which they participate. While context and event/situation models often reflect subjective mental representations, they enable individuals to generate subjective evaluations, knowledge, and thoughts appropriate to the current situation.

Analytical Procedure

a) **Comment Selection:** Approximately 200 comments were chosen based on their thematic representativeness, emotional intensity, frequency of engagement (likes, replies), and rhetorical complexity.

b) **Linguistic Analysis:** Each comment was analyzed for:

- Pronoun usage (“biz (we)”, “onlar (they)”)
- Adjectival framing (“işgalci (occupier)”, “yük (burden)”, “tehdit (threat)”)
- Metaphors (e.g., “istila (invasion)”, “sel (flood)”, “işgal (occupation)”)
- Rhetorical strategies such as exaggeration, moral polarization, and sarcasm.

c) **Ideological Framing:** Comments were interpreted in terms of their underlying assumptions about national identity, social hierarchy, morality, and economic justice.

d) **Narrative Positioning:** The role assigned to migrants -e.g., invader, burden, victim- was documented to show how digital discourse positions the migrant “other.”

e) **Sociopolitical Implications:** The broader societal functions of each discursive pattern were interpreted (e.g., reproducing xenophobia, legitimizing exclusionary policy, mobilizing political anger).

Findings

Within the scope of the research findings, initial explanations of specific numerical and statistical data related to the comments are presented, followed by a discourse analysis of selected key comments that reflect the identified themes.

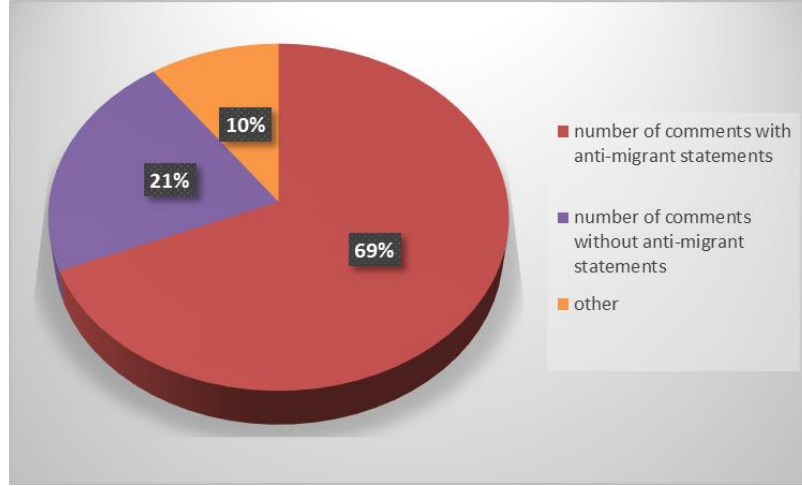


Figure: 3. Distribution of Comments with and without Direct Anti-Migrant Comments

The pie chart above (Fig. 3) categorizes the content of 6,131 video comments related to migrants. According to the chart data, 69% of the comments contain anti-migrant expressions, indicating that anti-migrant sentiment is highly prevalent on social media platforms. Approximately 21% of the comments do not directly express anti-migrant discourse but instead include more abstract, general, or indirectly related remarks. The remaining 10% is grouped under the category of “other,” consisting of comments that either do not clearly reflect a specific stance or cannot be classified. Overall, the chart demonstrates the dominance of anti-migrant discourse in digital spaces.



Figure: 4. Word Cloud of Comments - MAXQDA Word Cloud

This word cloud analysis, based on the content of 6,131 comments, reveals the discursive structure of migration and refugee debates in Turkey. The excessive use of the word “çok” (meaning “many”, 1008 times) indicates the large number of immigrants in the country. The dominant frequency of the words “Türk” (757 times) and “Türkiye” (656 times) indicates that the discussion is largely framed around national identity. A clear “us versus them” dichotomy is also evident in the prominent vocabulary used in the comments. The frequent use of terms such as “refugee” (385 times), “migration,” and “migrant” reflects the core parameters of the issue, while the recurrence of the word “country” (350 times) highlights a discourse centered on sovereignty and border security. In terms of political references, the frequent appearance of the words “Zafer” (372 times) and “Özdağ” (213 times) suggests that narratives referring to the Zafer Party, known for its radical nationalist ideology, hold a central place in the discourse. Likewise, the high frequency of the term “AKP” (340 times) reflects a critical perspective on the ruling party’s migration policies. The prominence of the word “million” points to widespread perceptions of an overwhelming migrant population and an underlying fear of becoming a minority.

These findings indicate that migration debates in Turkey are predominantly shaped by nationalist and oppositional frameworks, with national security and identity politics at the forefront. The discourse is also characterized by a polarizing tone, driven by references to political actors and institutions.

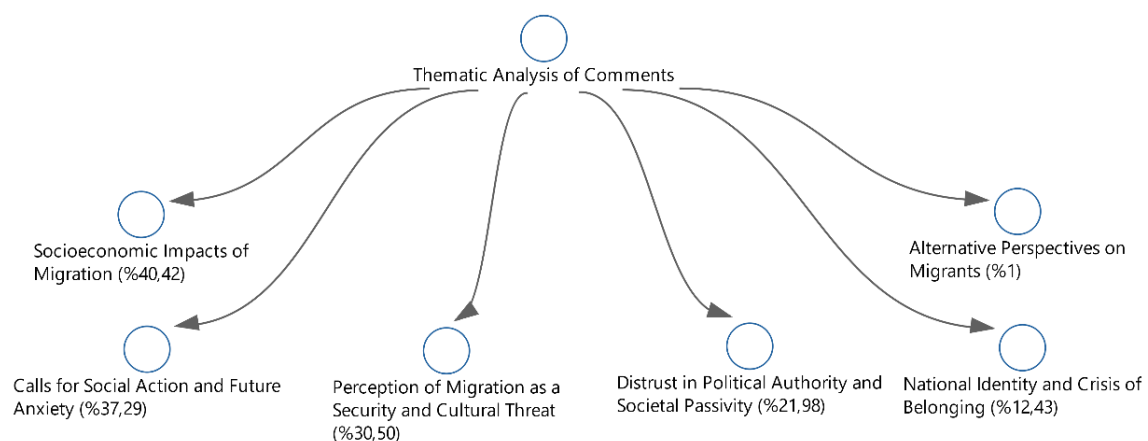


Figure: 5. Thematic Analysis of Comments - MAXQDA Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model

The six thematic categories identified through the thematic analysis of the comments are presented above. When ranked according to the number of comments included in each theme: 40.42% of all comments fall under “Socioeconomic Impacts of Migration”, 37.29% under “Calls for Social Action and Future Anxiety”, 30.50% under “Perception of Migration as

a Security and Cultural Threat”, 21.98% under “Distrust in Political Authority and Societal Passivity”, 12.43% under “National Identity and Crisis of Belonging” and 1% under “Alternative Perspectives on Migrants.” Since many comments reflect more than one theme, the percentages do not sum up to exactly 100%. These percentages indicate that user perspectives on migration and migrant-related issues are dispersed across a wide range of thematic concerns. The discourse analysis of comments reflecting these themes is presented in the following section.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Migration

This theme, comprising 40.42% of the comments, stands out as the most frequently discussed category, reflecting a strong public reaction to the perceived economic burden imposed by migrants on Turkish society. The statements of participants indicate that perceptions of economic hardship and resource scarcity play a determining role in shaping anti-migrant sentiment. For example, user comments such as:

- *“I’m 23 and unemployed shame on the government for letting 10 million people in while this low-income country can’t even take care of its own citizens,”*
- *“Rising rents and high prices are because of them,”*
- *“The government doesn’t take care of us with our taxes, but they take care of Syrians,”*
- *“I’m working, Syrians just hang around unemployed and still live better than me,”*
- *“We can’t find jobs because of the Syrians”*

reveal that individuals are directly linking issues like unemployment, rising cost of living, and exclusion from public support to the presence of migrants.

These expressions expose the frustration, particularly among the youth, stemming from their inability to integrate into the labor market, and a sense of anger fueled by the belief that the state prioritizes migrants over its own citizens in the allocation of limited resources. Comments related to increasing rent prices reflect how individuals associate the struggle to meet basic needs -such as housing- with migrants. In this context, fears of economic insecurity among the lower and middle classes and a weakening of the welfare state contribute to the erosion of social solidarity and a growing concern with protecting one's own economic position. As a result, migrants become symbolic scapegoats for economic and social instability, reinforcing the perception that the social order is under threat.

Similarly, comments such as:

- *“There’s a silent invasion going on, and I leave those who still believe we’d collapse without refugees to God,”*
- *“While Turks go hungry in this country, Syrians are being helped,”*
- *“A government that doesn’t care about its own people is looking after foreigners,”*
- *“Everything’s expensive now because of the Syrians”*

suggest that migrants are perceived as an economic threat and reflect a shared belief that the core constituents of Turkish society are being overlooked. The metaphor of “invasion” used to describe migrants not only frames their presence as a systematic and dangerous threat but also implicitly criticizes those segments of society who remain indifferent or defend migrant presence (i.e., “those who say we’d collapse without refugees”).

The portrayal of unemployed youth as subjects of ridicule points to feelings of status loss and marginalization. The phrase “*while Turks go hungry*” underscores the experience of poverty and inability to meet basic needs. The claim that “*the government is looking after foreigners*” implies a deep sense of exclusion and abandonment felt by citizens in their own country. Class inequalities and the unjust distribution of economic resources are redirected into anger toward migrants. Individuals express a sense of powerlessness not only toward the state but also toward the indifferent segments of society. In this process, where solidarity gives way to competition, migrants become scapegoats for economic crises, leading to a collective sense of hopelessness and deadlock.

Calls for Social Action and Future Anxiety

With a share of 37.29%, this theme ranks second and encapsulates both a strong desire for societal action in response to the migration issue and deep-seated anxieties about the future. The participants’ comments suggest a widespread belief that the state is incapable of effectively controlling migrant populations, prompting individuals to assume responsibility for finding solutions themselves. For instance, comments such as:

- *“We need to mine the borders again. We send them back by plane, and they come right back through tunnels or with ladders,”*
- *“Isn’t it time to take to the streets already??? The water’s boiling, we’re starting to cook,”*

- *“I’ll vote just to get rid of the migrants, there’s no other option,”*
- *“This can’t go on, we’ll either have to fight or leave the country,”*
- *“Everything will get better once the migrants are gone”*

demonstrate how societal anger is evolving into demands for political and even physical action.

These expressions commonly convey individuals’ intentions to act on their own initiative in response to the current situation, as well as a deep distrust toward official institutions. The phrase *“the water’s boiling”* signals that public anger has reached a boiling point, while *“no other option”* implies a sense of helplessness in the face of a broken or ineffective system. The hopeful but simplistic belief in *“everything will get better”* once migrants leave reflects a longing for resolution that is detached from realistic expectations.

The perceived inadequacy of the state in securing borders and maintaining public order contributes to a sense of authority vacuum, prompting citizens to develop a will to restore order themselves. The comments reveal that although individuals expressing themselves in media seek collective mobilization, this energy remains scattered, disorganized, and manifests primarily through individual reactions. The desire to intervene directly in a problem the state is failing to resolve tends to remain at the level of panicked individual responses.

Additionally, comments such as:

- *“In 20 years, the refugees will be running the country,”*
- *“At this rate, our children will be the refugees,”*
- *“If we don’t close the borders, we won’t last another 10 years,”*
- *“If this keeps up, Turks will end up as slaves”*

highlight that anti-migrant reactions are driven not only by present-day concerns but also by existential fears about the future. These comments position the perceived threat within an imminent and inevitable timeframe, voicing a strong concern over the potential loss of Turkish society’s demographic, cultural, and political dominance. Temporal references like *“20 years”* and *“in 10 years”* suggest that these fears are not purely abstract, but perceived as unfolding within a foreseeable timeline. Dystopian phrases such as *“they’ll run the country”* and *“we’ll be done for”* articulate a scenario in which migration leads to the collapse of Turkish identity and state structure. The expression *“Turks will be slaves”* uses exaggerated language

to indicate how these fears are intensified by historical traumas and past experiences of national decline.

In this context, the theme reflects how past traumas preserved in collective memory are reactivated by present demographic anxieties, pushing individuals toward a reflexive defense of collective identity. However, this collective reflex has not yet materialized into an organized or cooperative social movement; rather, it remains an outward expression of individual panic, marked by a disorganized and fragmented energy. Calls to “*take to the streets*” or “*fight*” reveal an emerging radicalization among citizens and their search for alternative means to overcome the perceived failures of the state. Thus, this theme illustrates the society’s strong will to assert control over both current problems and possible future scenarios, reflecting a desire to reclaim agency in the face of uncertainty.

Perception of Migration as a Security and Cultural Threat

With a proportion of 30.50%, this theme ranks third and highlights the perception of migrants as a threat to both public security and cultural integrity in Turkey. The participants’ comments reflect a widespread concern that migrants pose not only physical security risks but also endanger the continuity of cultural identity and national unity. Comments such as:

- “*If war breaks out, they’ll stab us in the back. How will the army deal with them?*”
- “*We’re letting Syrians invade our country with our own hands. How did we end up like this? Shame on us.*”
- “*We don’t feel safe on the streets because of them,*”
- “*Syrians will destroy Turkish culture,*”
- “*Crime has increased because of the migrants*”

reveal how migrants are being portrayed as an “internal threat” or “invaders,” contributing to the perception that the current social order is at risk of unraveling.

The common thread in these discourses is the belief that migrants directly harm the security and cultural continuity of Turkish society. Phrases such as “*stab us in the back*” frame migrants as untrustworthy and potentially hostile, while “*we don’t feel safe*” suggests a broadening sense of insecurity in both private and public spaces. The comments “*destroy Turkish culture*” and “*we’re letting them invade*” reflect not only fears of cultural collapse but also an internalized critique and sense of shame over societal inaction. The phrase “*How did*

we end up like this?” indicates a profound disappointment in what is perceived as the erosion of the strong nation-state ideal.

These expressions point to a weakening belief in the state’s ability to maintain security and cultural cohesion, prompting individuals to develop a collective defense reflex in response. Historical anxieties about occupation, invasion, and identity loss rooted in the collective memory are reignited by the presence of migrants and generate a perception of threat at both physical and symbolic levels. Security and culture are regarded as foundational pillars of the social structure, and any damage to these domains fosters a deep existential anxiety.

In this regard, comments such as:

- *“There are over 17 million invaders in the country. If we don’t send them back, by 2050 Turks will be the minority, and they’ll rule us under sharia,”*
- *“These people are everywhere, Turks feel like a minority in their own country,”*
- *“The streets are full of Syrians; we feel like strangers,”*
- *“Because of the Syrians, Turks live in fear”*

deepen the perception of a long-term threat posed by demographic transformation and cultural erosion. Numerical expressions such as *“17 million”* emphasize the scale of migrant presence, giving substance to these fears. References to *“2050”* and *“sharia”* illustrate dystopian projections of a radically altered cultural and political future.

Statements like *“We feel like strangers”* and *“we live in fear”* demonstrate that some segments of society are experiencing a breakdown in their sense of belonging, feeling unsafe even within their own country. The phrase *“like a minority”* reveals a perceived decline in social status, associated with the loss of demographic dominance. Describing migrants as “invaders” indicates that this perceived threat is imagined not only as an internal problem but also as an external enemy, blending fears of cultural change with imagery of military occupation.

This theme underscores the clash between the secular, homogeneous, and Western-oriented nation-building ideal of the Turkish Republic and today’s multicultural, multi-identity realities. This conflict generates both a sense of identity loss and a perception of physical threat, giving rise to a strong defensive impulse. In the face of changing social norms, individuals act out of a desire to preserve their existential integrity. Across media platforms, a collective sense

of panic is evident, and responses to migrant presence reflect the broader difficulties of redefining national identity in a time of transition.

Distrust in Political Authority and Societal Passivity

This theme, which ranks fourth with a rate of 21.98%, highlights public distrust toward the state apparatus and political authority, as well as a sense of passivity at the societal level. Participant comments reveal a strong perception that the current political power neglects the public interest in its migration policies, while the opposition remains indifferent to the situation. Comments such as:

- *“AKP is a betrayal project. Its goal is to destroy the Turkish Republic.”*
- *“The main opposition is asleep. When they feel some pressure about this issue, they come up with absurd statements.”*
- *“The government sold us out, and the opposition is just watching.”*
- *“The state protects foreigners, not its own people.”*
- *“This government made us bow down to the refugees.”*

reflect both deliberate accusations of betrayal against the ruling party and widespread frustration with the ineffectiveness of the opposition.

What is particularly striking in these statements is the perceived abandonment of the state's primary responsibility to protect its citizens, as well as the opposition's failure to intervene effectively. Phrases such as *“betrayal project”* and *“to destroy”* convey the belief that the government is intentionally undermining the national structure, while *“asleep”* and *“just watching”* reflect the opposition's perceived passivity and political ineffectiveness. Statements like *“protecting foreigners”* and *“made us bow down”* express the sentiment that government priorities have shifted away from citizens, making people feel marginalized. The phrase *“absurd statements”* further underscores a perception of unserious political discourse and an erosion of public trust.

These comments indicate that the legitimacy of the state is being seriously questioned, and the trust relationship between citizens and the state has been deeply damaged. Rather than being seen as inclusive and protective, the state is increasingly viewed by some as a direct source of threat and betrayal. This reflects a crisis of representation in the political system, wherein individuals feel excluded from decision-making processes. The resulting distrust

extends not only to political authorities but also to the functioning of the democratic system itself.

Distrust in the functionality of the state is further reinforced by a sense of disappointment in the public's own social reflexes. Comments such as:

- *"This nation is sleepwalking, seriously."*
- *"Everyone is silent, no one is saying anything."*
- *"The state abandoned us, and the people are doing nothing either."*
- *"At this rate, nothing will ever get better."*
- *"The people are asleep, the government is doing whatever it wants."*

An analysis of these comments reveals that the society, either consciously or passively, is perceived as unresponsive to political processes, resulting in a widespread sense of systemic collapse. Expressions such as *"sleepwalking"* and *"silent"* suggest a discourse where the public is thought to lack awareness and the capacity to intervene. The phrase *"doing whatever it wants"* points to a perceived lack of oversight over political authority, while *"nothing will get better"* reflects growing hopelessness about the future. *"Abandoned us"* conveys a belief that the state has forsaken its people, while *"doing nothing"* expresses anger directed at society's own passivity.

This theme illustrates the weakening of mechanisms of representation, accountability, and participation within Turkey's political system. It also reveals that individuals have lost confidence not only in political authorities but in their own capacity for collective action and resistance. This pervasive sense of distrust has led to growing feelings of helplessness, frustration, and disillusionment, weakening the potential for collective will and replacing political engagement with despair.

National Identity and Crisis of Belonging

Representing 12.43% of the analyzed content, this theme encompasses expressions reflecting a perceived threat to Turkish national identity and a loss of belonging among individuals within their own country. Participant comments reveal that as the visibility of migrants in social life increases, Turkish citizens feel relegated to a secondary position in their homeland, resulting in a profound sense of alienation and disintegration. Comments such as:

- *"We've become refugees in our own country. Shame on us."*

- *“On the metrobus, Turks are standing while refugees are sitting. There are just so many of them.”*
- *“As Turks, we’ve become strangers in our own country.”*
- *“It feels like being Turkish is a crime in this country.”*
- *“Because of the Syrians, Turkish identity is vanishing.”*

clearly reflect a crisis of belonging experienced by many individuals.

The analysis of these comments suggests that individuals feel they have lost visibility and dominance in public spaces, which they perceive as a threat to their national identity. Phrases such as *“we’ve become refugees”* and *“we’ve become strangers”* convey the feeling of being alienated in one’s own homeland. Observational statements like *“standing while refugees are sitting”* emphasize the visible dominance of migrants in everyday life. The phrase *“identity is vanishing”* points to the symbolic erosion of national belonging, while expressions such as *“shame on us”* and *“being Turkish is a crime”* reflect this perception as one of humiliation, failure, and loss. *“There are just so many of them”* emphasizes the scale and immediacy of this perceived threat, and the use of *“now”* suggests a critical awareness that this process has reached an irreversible point.

This theme reveals the rupture experienced when the homogenizing ideology of the Turkish nation-state confronts multicultural reality. Under the influence of migration, individuals feel they have lost control not only over physical but also symbolic spaces, deepening the identity crisis and fostering feelings of loneliness, devaluation, and helplessness. The transformation of public space creates a sense that one’s identity is becoming invisible, and this evolves into a crisis requiring a redefinition of collective identity.

Other comments under this theme, such as:

- *“Is it racism to protect your own interests? The religious ones are traitors to the homeland.”*
- *“We no longer have a say in our own country.”*
- *“We, the Turks, have been forgotten.”*
- *“Because of the Syrians, we no longer feel at home.”*

further illustrate a defensive reflex against this perceived erosion of identity. Commenters appear to be engaging in a form of self-defense against what they perceive as a

threat to their cultural and national existence. The statement *“protecting your own interests”* underscores the legitimacy of this defense, while the question *“Is it racism?”* reflects an internal debate over the social acceptability of such responses.

Phrases such as *“forgotten”* and *“we no longer have a say”* express feelings of political and social marginalization among Turkish citizens. *“We no longer feel at home”* suggests a transformation of the homeland from a space of belonging to one of alienation. The phrase *“the religious ones are traitors to the homeland”* points to an ideological dimension in which perceived threats are also linked to specific religious or political groups. Also, *“because of the Syrians”* demonstrates how this identity crisis and loss of belonging are being reduced to a single explanatory factor the presence of migrants.

An overall analysis of these comments suggests that society in Turkey has not fully integrated the multiculturalism that comes with modernity, and the boundaries of national identity have become increasingly fragile in the process of being redrawn. Changes in social norms due to urbanization, population mobility, and cultural diversity are creating a widespread sense that collective identity is being eroded. This perception is leading individuals to feel like guests in their own country and reveals a society deeply divided and internally conflicted in the process of reconstructing its identity. Ultimately, individuals are caught between the desire to preserve their identity and the inability to formulate a collective response to the perceived threat, resulting in a strong sense of entrapment.

Alternative Perspectives on Immigrants

Representing the smallest proportion at 1%, this theme encompasses positive or neutral attitudes toward migrants. The perspectives expressed within this framework reflect a view of migrants not as a threat, but as individuals to be understood within a humanitarian context. These comments often shift the responsibility for migration-related issues from migrants themselves to political authorities. Statements such as:

- *“Refugees are people too. We have to help them.”*
- *“These people are victims of war. Instead of blaming them, we should support them.”*
- *“Everyone has the right to live.”*
- *“The problem isn’t the migrants, it’s the government.”*
- *“Migrants aren’t the criminals, the real criminals are the ones who created these policies.”*

illustrate an ethical, conscientious, and structural critique-oriented stance against anti-migrant discourse.

A common emphasis in these expressions is the call to approach migration through the lens of human rights. Phrases like *“they are people too”* and *“right to live”* highlight a universalist discourse rooted in human dignity. Terms such as *“victims of war”* and *“instead of blaming, we should support them”* reveal a conscious effort to recognize migrant victimhood and encourage empathy. Additionally, remarks such as *“the problem isn’t the migrants”* and *“the real criminals”* shift the focus toward a structural critique, holding government policies accountable. The phrase *“we have to help”* positions this approach as an ethical obligation.

This theme demonstrates that a small segment of society has moved beyond dominant anti-migrant narratives, embracing a worldview grounded in universal values, human rights, and empathy. Although these comments propose an alternative model of solidarity, they remain marginal and often overshadowed by the prevalence of widespread anger toward migration and immigrants.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Among these, the portrayal of migrants in the media holds particular importance due to its impact on public opinion. Given the significant influence of social media in today’s world, examining individuals’ views on migration and migrant issues expressed via these platforms is a necessary endeavor. This is because social media is rife with negative comments and ideas, propaganda-style rhetoric, hate speech, and misinformation. These characteristics of social media significantly shape public perceptions. As noted by Komendantova et al. (2023) and Lakzaei et al. (2024), misinformation and hate speech targeting migrants on digital platforms contribute to the normalization of anti-migrant discourse. Considering the media's role in shaping public perception, comments made on platforms like YouTube are critical for understanding how media users perceive, conceptualize, and ideologically frame migrants and refugees.

The portrayal of immigrants in the media is often presented in similarly negative ways across the globe. The approach of both local and global media in covering immigrants is frequently shaped within frameworks of negative stereotypes. The media's portrayal of immigrants, whether in Turkey, Europe, or America, has profound effects on public opinion. Specifically in the context of Turkey, the research by Erol and Yaylacı (2017) on the representation of Afghan asylum seekers in news texts found that Afghan refugees are

predominantly represented negatively in the news, and that the media has a significant effect on shaping the perceptions of both Afghan refugees and the local population. In Kurt's (2018) study, it is stated that immigrants in the Turkish media are generally positioned as “scapegoats,” a “threat,” or particularly as an economic “burden”; such discourses and representations are reproduced; within the dominant media discourse in Turkey, immigrants are mostly referred to with negative connotations and depicted as a group that brings social, cultural, occasionally moral, and especially economic “problems” to the country.

Such media discourses and the negative perspective in public perception towards immigrants became widespread with the increasing number of Syrians in Turkey. In this vein, according to the research by Doğanay & Çoban Keneş (2016) on the portrayal of Syrians in the Turkish print media, Syrian refugees are predominantly framed as a “threat” in the media. This perception is used both as a tool to criticize the government's foreign policy and is associated with economic burden and security issues. Furthermore, the same research revealed that the presence of refugees is objectified by emphasizing the money spent on Syrians, aid provided, and the number of Syrians, while disregarding the humanitarian dimension; their “hyper-visibility” in cities is conveyed through a discourse that “emotionalizes” public reactions.

Similar research findings are valid in other countries. Research by Gonzalez O'Brien et al. (2019) demonstrates how the perception of immigrants has changed over time. According to the findings of this study, while sanctuary city policies in the US in the 1980s were framed in the media with religious and moral justifications, the media discourse shifted over time to focus on crime and partisanship as the target audience moved towards undocumented immigrants. The increased emphasis on crime and polarization in the media, particularly following the 2015 Steinle case and the rise of Trump, deeply affected public perception and overshadowed the actual objectives of the policies.

Cengiz & Karlsson (2021), in their research on the portrayal of immigrants in the Danish media, found that the media uses a distinct language towards non-Western and Muslim immigrants; that newspapers distinguish “real Danes” from others; that the “us and them” distinction is prominent in the media's categorization of immigrants; that Islam is perceived as a cultural threat, while immigrants are also seen as an economic burden; and that the media's categorization of immigrants as the “Other” has a significant impact on public opinion. Another study (Dhëmbo et al. 2021) reveals that between 2015 and 2018, themes in news related to immigrants in the Albanian media predominantly had a negative tone, featuring discourses framed around security dominated by threats, and that a binary distinction between “our

immigrants” and “other immigrants” was present in news coverage concerning migration and crime, migration and economic development, and migration and socio-demographic impact.

All this research demonstrates the dominant power of the media. Media discourses are crucial in managing perceptions and creating polarization. The empirical research conducted by Blinder & Jeannet (2017) shows that the portrayal of immigrants in the media can influence public perceptions. In the mentioned study, control and experimental groups were presented with different portrayals of immigrants. In the control group, participants were highly likely to perceive immigrants as “asylum seekers” or “illegal” immigrants and to overestimate the size of the foreign-born population. On the other hand, in the experimental group shown media reports containing positive portrayals of immigrants, these perceptions were reduced. A similar study was conducted by Asbury-Kimmel (2024) on how political narratives affect attitudes towards immigrants. This research found that groups who listened to positive political narratives about immigrants were less supportive of reducing immigrant numbers, whereas anti-immigrant discourse depicting undocumented immigrants as undeserving individuals increased support for reducing immigration across all racial groups. The aforementioned studies illustrate how political discourses and media coverage concerning immigrants influence public attitudes towards migration.

The research at hand also reveals that comments posted under videos published on the YouTube social media platform generally possess a negative tone, with polarizing and xenophobic language dominating the discourse. The negative portrayal of Syrian immigrants in the Turkish media particularly as an “economic and cultural threat” and a “burden” along with their frequent appearance in political debates, has a profound impact on public opinion. Indeed, the thematic and discourse analysis of the comments examined under the YouTube videos within the scope of this research demonstrates this situation clearly.

The analysis of user comments on YouTube videos related to migration and migrant issues in Turkey reveals that social media platforms play a significant role in articulating social perceptions and ideological positions. Thematic and discourse analyses show that the vast majority of user comments reflect anti-migrant sentiment, shaped around themes such as economic burden, cultural threat, security concerns, and crises of national identity. In particular, the association of migrants with economic hardship and unemployment, the erosion of trust in the state and political authority, societal passivity, and existential anxieties about the future are prominent throughout the comments. The characterization of migrants as “invaders” or “threats” points to the reactivation of historical fears of invasion and identity loss, which are

further reinforced by nationalist discourse. This suggests that Turkish social media users' reactions to migration are not only driven by current socio-economic challenges but are also deeply embedded in historical and cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, a small minority of users offer alternative perspectives that are humanitarian, empathetic, and structurally oriented toward the root causes of migration. However, these alternative discourses remain marginal and struggle to gain visibility amid the dominant voices of anger and opposition. This research reveals that social media platforms contribute to the normalization of anti-migrant discourse and the intensification of societal polarization, while simultaneously hindering processes of social solidarity and integration. Therefore, resolving migration-related issues in Turkey requires not only political and economic reforms but also the strengthening of media literacy and platforms for intercultural and intergroup dialogue. These steps are vital for reducing xenophobic discourses and facilitating the integration and adaptation of migrants and refugees. While the overwhelmingly negative content in the media may not represent the full spectrum of societal views, it is nonetheless crucial for understanding how media can fuel xenophobia and shape public opinion.

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