

SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN TURKISH NEWSPAPERS (2015-2024): A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS POST-9/11 WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL

Türk Gazetelerinde Göçün Güvenlikleştirilmesi (2015-2024): Kopenhag Okulu ÇerçeveSinde 11 Eylül Sonrası Bir Söylem Analizi

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Abstract

This study examines how international migration has been securitized through media discourses from September 11, 2001 to the present. Within the framework of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, this analysis investigates how migrants are constructed as social threats and how these discourses shape the perception of security within society. It has been determined that the media often presents migrants as "potential threats," and that such discourses, by emphasizing cultural and ethnic distinctions, lead to social polarization. The study employed qualitative discourse analysis as its methodology, examining news articles from 2015 to 2024 in Turkey's high-circulation national newspapers (Hürriyet, Sabah, Sözcü, Cumhuriyet) selected through purposive sampling. The analysis process involved coding the headlines, blurbs, and text of the news articles, identifying metaphors and framing strategies, and interpreting these findings in the context of securitization theory. In addition, secondary data analysis using statistics from institutions such as UNHCR, IOM, and Eurostat was used to reveal international migration trends. The study reveals that media discourse not only shapes social perceptions but also influences political decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing the securitization of migration at the institutional level. Consequently, security-centered discourse produced by the media contributes to the negative positioning of migrants and the formation of a public perception that legitimizes this framing. These findings indicate that the relationship between migration and security will continue to be a defining factor in the future. Therefore, strengthening media literacy and critical discourse analysis is critical for developing a more balanced and human rights-based approach to migration. **Keywords:** Migration, Security, Copenhagen School, Securitization, Discourse.

Öz

Bu çalışma, 11 Eylül 2001 sonrası dönemde uluslararası göçün medya söylemleri aracılığıyla nasıl bir güvenlik meselesi hâline getirildiğini incelemektedir. Kopenhag Okulu'nun güvenlikleştirme teorisi temel alınarak, medya tarafından üretilen söylemlerin göçmenleri nasıl "sosyal tehdit" olarak kurguladığı ve bu söylemlerin toplumdaki güvenlik algısını nasıl dönüştürdüğü analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, medyanın göçmenleri sıkılıkla "istila", "dalga" ve "yük" gibi metaforlarla sunarak kültürel, ekonomik ve kamusal düzen temelli tehdit algularını güçlendirdiğini göstermektedir. Çalışmada yöntem olarak nitel söylem analizi kullanılmış, amaçlı örneklemle ile seçilen Türkiye'de yüksek tirajlı ulusal gazetelerin (Hürriyet, Sabah, Sözcü, Cumhuriyet) 2015–2024 yılları arasındaki haberleri incelenmiştir. Analiz süreci; haberlerin başlık, spot ve metin düzeyinde kodlanması, metafor ve çerçeveleme stratejilerinin belirlenmesi ve bu bulguların güvenlikleştirme teorisi bağlamında yorumlanması içermektedir. Ayrıca, uluslararası göç trendlerini ortaya koymak üzere ikincil veri analizi ile UNHCR, IOM ve Eurostat gibi kurumların istatistikleri kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, medya söylemlerinin yalnızca toplumsal algıyı şekillendirmekle kalmayıp, siyasal karar alma süreçlerini de etkileyerek göçün güvenlikleştirilmesini kurumsal düzeyde pekiştirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak, medya tarafından üretilen güvenlik merkezli söylemler, göçmenlerin olumsuz şekilde konumlandırmasına ve kamuoyunda bu çerçeveyi meşrulaştıran bir algının oluşmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu bulgular, göç ve güvenlik ilişkisinin gelecekte de belirleyici bir unsur olmaya devam edeceğini göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, medya okuryazarlığı ve eleştirel söylem analizinin güçlendirilmesi, göç olgusuna yönelik daha dengeli ve insan hakları temelli bir yaklaşım geliştirilmesi açısından kritik önem taşımaktadır. **Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, Güvenlik, Kopenhag Okulu, Güvenlikleştirme, Söylenme**

Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, profound changes occurred in the field of security, both structurally and functionally; this transformation extensively reshaped threat perceptions as well as the elements considered as the object of security (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998, pp.23–24). During this period, migration became a central issue in international relations, producing significant effects on social structures. Migration movements were carried out with the desire to achieve better living conditions, and under the impact of globalization, both the causes and the consequences of migration deepened. Within the neoliberal economic order, states with rising levels of prosperity became the main destinations for migrants, which in turn led to remarkable changes in states' attitudes toward migration (Huysmans, 2000, pp.751). In the post-Cold War period, the intensification of migration flows was defined by many states as a threat to social and national security (Buzan et al., 1998, pp.36–40).

Supported by media content and secondary data analysis, the study shows how international migration flows and the number of migrants has changed over time. Selected newspaper articles have also been scrutinised for their discourse. This analysis reveals how migrants are portrayed

with different metaphors such as “invasion,” “wave,” “burden”. These portrayals influence how migrants are viewed by the public. The research indicates that the media presents migrants as cultural economic and security threats through securitization discourse which becomes part of the national security nexus. To conclude, media discourses produce security constructions against migrants which affect not just the popular acceptance but also the migration policies of states. The study shows the interaction between the media and security policy. The media plays a role in the alteration of social constructions. The results show that debates of migration and security will remain a top priority going forward; media literacy and critical discourse analysis are essential tools for more balanced perspectives on migration.

In the wake of the Cold War, profound changes took place in the field of security in both a structural and functional sense. This transformation reshaped extensively threat perceptions as well as the element that was considered the object of security. Migration became an issue of international relations which had significant consequences on the social structure. Under the impact of globalization, the causes and the consequences of migration movements with the aim of obtaining better living conditions increased. States that became prosperous within the neoliberal economic order became the major destinations of migrants. This resulted in significant changes to states' attitude toward migration (Huysmans, 2000, pp.751). Many states defined the intensification of migration flows as a threat to social and national security after the Cold War (Buzan et al., 1998, pp.36-40). One main reason why migration is an increasingly important issue is its large scale. Not only do these massive migrations have an effect on the migrants themselves, they also have an effect on the host societies. It is in this sense that the migrants come with social, security related risks. The migration process includes very serious humanitarian threats like human smuggling and deaths. Some states are therefore adopting policies that prioritize state security. In this case states see migration as a phenomenon that threatens public order; thus, migration policies are framed around a security centric approach. At this point, nation-states put their own security as the reference object and evaluate migrants from an exclusionary perspective.

When both two world wars and the Cold War are taken into the consideration within the context of migration conducts, local clashes primarily affected the migration waves. Large masses during the First World War, for instance, the incline was in the route from Europe to colonies; on the contrary to ones after the Second World War changed the direction from colonies to the colonizer's lands and other European countries. However, in this very context, migrants were not evaluated as a menace while they were seen as the shareholders of the national economies. Within the case of Germany in 1970's, migrants were welcomed as the “almost citizens” of the country.

In addition to this condition, through the Cold War, they were stated as “guests” in Europe and they were utilized as the instrument of their political discourses. On the contrary, the general perception of the migrants altered especially after 1990’s and the phenomenon of the September 11, the terrorist activities influenced the course of the transformation of the societies and shook the ground irreversibly in terms of securitization of migration.

According to the Copenhagen School, security threats do not emerge naturally; rather, they are constructed through the discourses of political actors (Wæver, 1995, pp.46–87). Within this context, political leaders’ framing of migrants as a threat to social peace is not merely an observation but constitutes a securitizing act (Buzan et al., 1998, pp.119–120). These discourses move migrants from the political realm into the security realm, legitimizing extraordinary interventions. Under the influence of securitization discourse, migrants in many countries are subjected to administrative surveillance, deported without legal safeguards, and even exposed to disproportionate use of force (Balzacq, 2005, pp.176). Such practices violate human rights and refugee law, yet are legitimized by states on the grounds of ensuring social welfare and order (Aras, 2014, pp.72-73, cited in Argın, 2021, pp.81).

In conclusion, the relationship between migration and security reflects the state-centric rather than individual-centric orientation of states’ understanding of security. This approach contradicts Locke’s conception of security based on individual liberty; the notion of “privilege” in this context points to a problematic domain where states legitimize rights violations in line with their own interests.

The discourses of media on migrants contribute much to a crucial role in the securitization of migration. Especially in global media, migrants are often presented with security-related terms such as “crisis,” “influx,” and “invasion,” leading to their perception as threats in public opinion (Huysmans, 2000, pp.752; Buzan et al., 1998, pp.36–40). Institutions of media which by associating migrants in connection with terrorism and crime, or the disruption of social order, provide legitimacy to political actors’ securitization discourses (Balzacq, 2005, pp.174). This intrinsic relationship between the perception and the reality is also enhanced by the spread of disinformation on social media, which gives rises to counter-attitudes among the public against migrants. Therefore, migration begins to turn into a security issue by means of political discourses and also the content produced by the media, as well. These representations constructed by the media proves obstacles to the integration of migrants into society. As defined in Habermas’s work The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, the public sphere is highlighted as a space for communication and negotiation where social issues are brought to the common mind through rational discussion

(Habermas, 1989). However, as emphasized in the Theory of Communicative Action, when communication turns into strategic action rather than rational agreement, the democratic nature of the public sphere weakens and discourses begin to be shaped by power relations (Habermas, 1984). In this context, the media accelerates the structural transformation of the public sphere with security-focused strategic discourses, removing migration issues from communicative debate, and plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of migrants. Consequently, the issue of migration is evolving from being a social issue open to public reasoning into a political arena dominated by security-centered discourses reproduced by the media. As a result, it paves the way for policies institutionalizing discrimination (Kaya & Kentel, 2005, p.48).

The relationship between migration and security has a multidimensional character. In this regard, it should be evaluated not only from the perspective of states but also of individuals, international organizations, and civil society. Migrants' security problems emerge not only in host countries but also at every stage of the migration process. Addressing the challenges faced by migrants requires the adoption of a human rights-centered perspective, in addition to a security perspective. This process constitutes an important turning point that can be analyzed within the framework of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory.

There is a large body of research in the literature on the securitization of migration in the Turkish context. Focusing on the media's power to shape perceptions, Gönültaş and Mulvey (2023) show that negative media representation increases discrimination against Syrian refugees, particularly among adolescents, through mechanisms of threat perception and prejudice. Examining the intersection of security and terrorism discourse with perceptions of refugees, Ergen and Zaimoğlu (2022) compare Germany and Turkey to reveal how the terrorism framework produces different forms of securitization effects on public opinion towards refugees. Addressing anti-refugee sentiment within the framework of contact theory, Kayaoglu (2025) finds that the level of contact with refugees significantly shapes attitudes towards them in Turkey, but that this effect varies depending on the socio-political context. In terms of economic impacts, Demirkol (2024) examines the long-term effects of refugees on the labor market in Turkey, pointing out that perceptions of economic pressure fuel securitization discourses. Demirkol's (2022) empirical study on the European Union also shows that migration has been constructed as a security threat at the EU level in political discourses. Taken together, these studies reveal that the securitization of migration in Turkey is shaped by multidimensional processes such as media discourses, terrorism frameworks, economic concerns, and social contact dynamics.

This study aims to analyze the mechanisms of securitizing international migration through media discourses and to examine the reflections of such discourses on public policies and social perceptions (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). The central problem of the study is to identify by which discursive strategies migrants are securitized in the media and how these discourses construct a particular perception of security in society. The research revolves around the question: How have media discourses in the post-September 11 period shaped the perception of migrants as a social security threat? Within this framework, the main objective of the study is to analyze the ways and methods through which international migration has been securitized via media discourses after September 11. Accordingly, the following sub-questions are posed:

How come can one claim that the media links migrants with a security threat?

What are the metaphors and discourse strategies which constructs securitization?

What can be accounted for the influences of discourses on the issue of public policies and perception of security?

How can the effects of these discourses created by the media on the public's understanding of security and countries' migration policies be explained, and through which channels do they emerge? In the securitization process that presents migrants as a security risk, what main metaphors, discourse methods, and linguistic tools are used by the media? What discourse markers, representations, and news practices can be identified in which the media associates migrants with security threats?

The main argument of the study focuses upon the idea of the fact that discourses of media frame and confine migrants to the idea of the agents related with security threats. In this way, the produced arguments shape both policies and societal perceptions. This research also includes some certain limitations. Firstly, the study covers the span of discourses on September 11 and ignores the previous periods. Moreover, the duration between 2001 and 2024 presents challenges in analyzing each period in an equal evaluation. The date of the research which covers a limited numbers of media sources might not likely be holistic in terms of media. It limits the generalisation of the findings, as well. Because of the fact that discourse analysis is a kind of qualitative method which requires interpretative features, it may have the possibility of affecting the evaluations of the researcher. Moreover, due to the contextual differences, comparing and contrasting contents in various cultures and languages are too challenging to discuss. Consequently, some certain technical issues such as the restrictions and limitations of digital or published archives may lead to an unproductive assessment of data available for the research.

The primary research question of this study is to reveal the role played by the media in increasingly framing the phenomenon of migration as a security issue in the aftermath of September 11. In this regard, the study analyzes through which discursive strategies and metaphors the media constructs migrants as a “security threat,” how these representations generate a sense of insecurity in the public sphere, and how this perception legitimizes states’ security-oriented migration policies. The research aims to understand how security narratives produced by media discourse shape both public perception and policy-making processes.

1. The Copenhagen School and the Theory of Securitization

The Copenhagen School, formed under the leadership of scholars such as Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde, Morten Kelstrup, Pierre Lemaitre, and Elzbieta Tromer, is an intellectual tradition that has made significant contributions to the field of security studies. Among the school’s most important contributions to international security are securitization/desecuritization theory, the sectoral security approach, and the regional security complex theory (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998; Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

In the post-Cold War period, with transformations in the international system, the Copenhagen School introduced a new perspective on the concept of security. Securitization theory emerged as an important component of this transformation and became an effective tool in the analysis of military interventions. The theory was first introduced by Ole Wæver in 1995 (Wæver, 1995). Based on a constructivist foundation, securitization theory conceptualizes security as a speech act. According to this perspective, security issues arise not from objective threats but are constructed through speech acts that frame certain matters as threats. State-related issues are presented as security problems through these speech acts, a process referred to as “securitization.” According to the theory, defining an issue as “security” transforms it into a security problem. The school is not concerned with whether the issue constitutes a “real” threat, but rather explains it as an intersubjective construction within society from a constructivist standpoint.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the security-focused framing of migration in media discourse has become more pronounced. Research conducted after 2020 shows that during the pandemic, migrants were depicted through new metaphors such as “hygiene risk,” “carrier,” and “uncontrolled movement” (Eberl et al., 2021; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2021). However, the 2021–2023 Belarus-Poland border crisis in Europe and increasing irregular migration in the Mediterranean have paved the way for the media to adopt an increasingly militarized security

discourse on migration (Tideswell & Zakiev, 2022). These developments demonstrate that securitization theory continues to retain its explanatory power in contemporary media–migration debates.

1.1. Securitization Theory

Securitization theory argues that security is not an objective threat but rather a discursive construction. In this context, security emerges when an actor defines a particular issue as a threat and presents it to the public in order to justify the right to take extraordinary measures (Wæver, 1995, pp.46–87; Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998, p.23).

The concept of securitization was first used by Wæver in the mid-1990s. The Copenhagen School's theoretical work pioneered this approach. For Wæver, security is expressed as a speech act. The concept of securitization is explained as follows:

So, what is security? With the help of speech act theory, we can regard security as a speech act. In this use, security is not something more real than an interest, independent of utterance. The utterance itself is the act. By saying it, something is done. When a representative of a state utters the word security, he thereby claims a special right to use all necessary means to block a development. (Wæver, 1995, p.55).

In the process of securitization, the media becomes an effective tool. Particularly in the securitization of migration, the functional role of the media comes to the forefront. In Europe and Turkey, news about migrants is frequently presented to the public in connection with concepts such as social order, public security, and cultural integrity. The media links migrants with potential criminals, burdens, or threats, thereby reinforcing the perception of migration as a negative phenomenon in public opinion (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998, p.119; Balzacq, 2005, p.172). Such discourses persuade the public and enable political actors to legitimize extraordinary policies. By exaggerating issues such as migrants' crime rates, their use of public services, or cultural differences, the media helps transform migration into an “urgent matter” that justifies political intervention.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, migration has been addressed in media discourse through a more pronounced security-focused approach. Research conducted after 2020 reveals that during the pandemic, migrants were represented using new metaphors such as “hygiene risk,” “carrier,” and “uncontrolled movement” (Eberl et al., 2021; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2021). However, the 2021–2023 Belarus-Poland border crisis in Europe and the increase in irregular crossings in the

Mediterranean have demonstrated that the media has increasingly framed migration through militarized security language (Tideswell & Zakiev, 2022). Taken together, these developments indicate that securitization theory continues to retain its explanatory power in contemporary media-migration debates.

1.2.The Elements of Securitization

The process of securitization consists of three fundamental elements: the referent object, the securitizing actor, and the functional actors. The first element is the referent object. The referent object is that which is perceived as being under threat. According to the Copenhagen School, the referent object is something that needs to be protected. The size and level of the referent object are significant. Securitization can occur on three different levels: micro(individuals), macro(world peace), and meso. However, the meso level is the most significant, including entities such as states, civilizations, and nations. While securitization may occur at all levels, it is most effectively realized at the meso level. The securitizing actor refers to the person or groups that perform the speech act of security. These actors are generally political leaders, bureaucrats, and states, as well as other pressure groups. Securitizing actors define what they perceive as threats to the referent objects and articulate the measures to be taken against them.

Functional actors vary depending on the sector in which the securitization occurs. According to Buzan et al., functional actors are those who, without being either the referent object or the securitizing actor, significantly influence decisions within the realm of security (Baysal & Lüleci, 2015, p.80). The media as a functional agent is one of the most influential tools in this process (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998, pp.36–40). It takes places as an active organ which is used to justify migrants as threat to the notion of security. The governmental crisis for instance in Syria leads to a massive Syrian refuge waves to Türkiye and from Türkiye to Europe. The discourses of medias contribute much to reshape the perception of threat. The terms such as “problem,” “burden,” “uncontrolled waves of immigration” are preferred to address the phenomenon of migration on media, which arouse fear and anxiety in societies. Therefore, it gives chances to be taken extraordinary measures by politicians (Balzacq, 2005, p.173; Huysmans, 2000, p.751). In other words, one may claim that the media solely is not a direct actor of securitization process but a functional facilitator in perform.

For example, in Turkey, some media outlets portrayed Syrian refugees as “disrupting public order” or as an “economic burden,” thereby providing justification for anti-immigration policies.

These discourses tend to intensify particularly during election periods or times of economic crisis, triggering anti-immigrant sentiments and transforming them into a tool of political populism (Balzacq, 2005, p.176).

The impact of digital media has increased significantly since 2020. Social media platforms have become a major actor, enabling the rapid dissemination of content that frames migration as a “security issue” (Triandafyllidou & Mantanika, 2021). Particularly on platforms such as TikTok and X (Twitter), the circulation of anti-migrant videos supported by audiovisual metaphors has allowed such securitizing discourses to spread more rapidly among young audiences (Ekman, 2022). In the case of Turkey, misinformation and disinformation circulated on social media between 2022 and 2023 are reported to have significantly heightened perceptions of threat toward Syrian and Afghan migrants (Teyit, 2023; Kaya & Kıracı, 2023). These developments indicate that the media has moved beyond being merely a passive reflector and is increasingly becoming an active actor in the process of securitization.

1.3. Populist Right, Security, and Media Discourses

The populist right movement has produced a political discourse based on issues of immigration, national identities and security issues. These narratives extensively cover the media, playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion. Such narratives generally revolve around the binary oppositions of “us” and “them.” In this context, migrants can be said that they are assigned to a position as the “other,” which label them as threats to cultural integrity and national security (Huysmans, 2000, p.751; Laclau, 2005, p.39; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p.24).

In the media, these discourses are reproduced through speech acts in headlines such as “Our borders are under threat,” “They work while our citizens are unemployed,” or “Social peace is in danger.” Such reports serve to legitimize anti-immigrant policies in the eyes of society and simultaneously contribute to the restriction of individual rights and freedoms (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998, p.119; Balzacq, 2005, p.173).

Rightist media companies, especially in Europe, reconstruct and criminalize migrants by means of framing them with the rise of crime rates. As in Turkey, counter-immigrant discourses in news happen to be appearing on headlines of mainstream and social media. It reshapes the public concerns by making use of discourses of political leaders. This active process gives rise to spread of policies in relation to securitization through the media to larger target groups.

1.4. Migration and Securitization

The concept of securitization refers to the process by which political actors present a phenomenon as a threat to national security and the public legitimizes this framing (Wæver, 1995, p.60). According to the Copenhagen School, this process is a discursive practice: the actor convinces the audience, rendering the issue “extraordinary” (Buzan et al., 1998). Migration is among the topics encompassed within this theoretical framework.

Initially considered an economic, humanitarian, or cultural issue, migration has increasingly been represented by many right-wing governments and media outlets as a potential threat (Huysmans, 2000, p.765). Within this framing, discourses commonly emphasize that:

Migrants create an economic burden,

Threaten public security,

Undermine social values (Ibrahim, 2005, p.170).

One of the main instruments of securitization is political discourse. States and right-wing populist movements legitimize extraordinary measures by defining migrants as sources of danger. In this process, both the media and political actors produce narratives that associate migrants with “crime” and “terror,” leading the public to perceive migration negatively (Bigo, 2002, p.65). Political leaders and media outlets portray migrants as “criminals,” “illegal,” or “linked to terrorism,” thereby garnering public support for stricter measures (Bigo, 2002, p.65).

Huysmans (2006) conceptualizes this process as a “regime of managed unease.” In such a regime, a constant sense of threat is produced, and control is maintained over society through uncertainty and fear. The securitization process leads to the hardening of migration policies. In regions such as Europe and the United States, deportations of migrants, the expansion of surveillance mechanisms, and restrictions on asylum seekers are among the most evident outcomes (Huysmans, 2006, p.134). This situation exposes migrants to discrimination not only economically and socially but also legally and politically. Anti-immigrant discourses are thus constructed and disseminated to the masses through both media and politics. Migration ceases to be merely an economic or social issue; it is reframed as a threat to the state’s existence, the identity of society, and public order.

Securitization theory is not merely a process of discourse production but also one of instrumentalizing societal fears and perceptions of threat (Buzan et al., 1998). At this point, Giorgio

Agamben's (2005) concept of the "state of exception" sheds further light on the process: migrants, due to the ambiguity of their legal status, are reduced to "bare life," excluded from the rights of normal citizenship. In addition, within Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, the control of migrant bodies can be directly linked to modern states' strategies of population management (Foucault, 1979). The regulation, restriction, or exclusion of migrants emerges as one of the methods through which states maintain sovereignty. Along with these theoretical frameworks, the securitization of migration is not limited to security discourses but also extends into domains such as health, housing, and freedom of movement, thereby ensuring migrants' control across multiple dimensions.

1.5. Biopolitics, State of Exception, and Migration

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics becomes particularly significant in explaining the securitization of migration. According to Foucault, the modern state turns the population into an "object of governance," regulating and maintaining control over society by monitoring data such as birth rates, life expectancy, health, and mobility of individuals (Foucault, 2003). In this context, migrants are coded as "risky bodies" that the state needs to control, and social perception begins to form accordingly. Policies such as the "surveillance," "registration," or "deportation" of migrants manifest as tools of biopolitical governance.

This theory is especially evident in Europe through practices such as the management of migrant camps, identity checks, and the collection of biometric data. In Turkey, the Presidency of Migration Management's database, fingerprinting, and registration systems serve as an example of biopolitical control over migrants.

Securitization is not only the production of a discourse but also a form of governance. Giorgio Agamben's concept of the "state of exception" is crucial in this context. The state uses its power to suspend constitutional rights for migrants it defines as extraordinary threats, placing them in a "bare life" position that excludes them from legal status (Agamben, 2005). This situation results in the marginalization of refugees and irregular migrants both in physical space (camps, deportation centers) and in the legal sphere.

While discussions on the securitization of migration are highly significant, addressing this approach in isolation risks overlooking the management dimension of the migration phenomenon. The literature on Turkey's migration policies indicates that security-focused discourse has increased substantially, particularly since 2011. However, it also reveals that migration management is

grounded in a broad governance framework that includes institutional capacity, service delivery, integration policies, and multi-actor coordination (Arslan, 2021, pp.1–24). In this context, the Presidency of Migration Management, AFAD, local governments, and civil society organizations undertake regulatory and integrative roles in areas such as housing, health, social services, and integration. Thus, migration management in Turkey is shaped not only by a threat-focused framework but also by a multifaceted process that aims at social integration (Arslan, 2021, pp.10–23). Assessing migration solely through a security lens risks narrowing both governance capacities and the scope of public policies developed to address the rights-based needs of migrants. Therefore, critiques centered on securitization must offer a balanced analytical framework that also incorporates the more inclusive, human-centered, and public service-oriented dimensions of migration management.

1.6. Post-Structuralist Approach and Exclusionary Discourse

Post-structuralist security theories analyze security not only through concrete threats but also through linguistic and discursive constructions (Der Derian, 1992; Campbell, 1998). According to these theories, migrants are used to sharpen the boundary between “us” (native citizens) and “them” (the others). Migrants are framed with metaphors such as “cultural invasion,” “displacement of the native population,” or “threat to our way of life.”

This discourse spreads through the media. For example, content frequently encountered on social media, such as “Silent Invasion,” is a direct example of the post-structuralist concept of the “construction of the Other.”

1.7. Right-Wing and Anti-Migrant Discourses in the European and U.S. Contexts

As in the example of the U.S. the era of Donald Trump is associated with counter-migrant rhetorics which are transformed into institutional ones. Trump promised to build a huge wall which covers the continent border and stressed the link between migrants with the terms of violence and crime. The criminalization of Latin American migrants by Trump was with the accusation of migrants with “rape,” “gang membership,” and “drug-trafficking” (Trump, 2015, June 16, cited in The Washington Post; CNN, 2016).

This type of challenging policies made families fall apart and provoked international sensitivities. According to a report, 2,500 children or more had torn from their parent by 2018

(ACLU, 2019). Europe also had the same issues under the leaderships of AfD, Victor Orbán and Marine Le Pen. They made use of counter-migrant discourses in their political activities. Orbán named the refugee crisis in 2015 as a kind of “cultural invasion” (Wodak, 2015). In Germany, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) supported the groups which tended to create an association of migrants with unemployment, crimes and radical Islamization. AfD had gained huge success in high percentage of votes as 22 percent and became the second-largest party in the country (Politico, 2023).

For France, the leader of RN (Rassemblement National), Marine Le Pen showed migrants as a direct threat to national “French values” and named the situation as “cultural war.” Her political leadership increased the votes in elections of president in 2022 and she produced counter-migrant utterances. As for the prime minister in Hungary, Viktor Orbán justified his policies by attributing the idea of corruption and erosion of Western Cultures to migrants (Mudde, 2019, p.103).

The European policy makers show that the process of securitization is not instrument only of rightist movements, but also of centrist politicians. As a result, migration policies have begun to be problematic for creating a wider consensus in terms of enhanced border security, hard criteria for deportation and limitations on citizenship. Such discourses both directly and indirectly affect the mass of voters in relation to the sensitive issues such as national identity, counter-migrant policies and so on.

1.8.Migration, the Right, and Security in the Turkish Context

Following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Türkiye faced massive influxes of migration. In the early years, religious-cultural discourses such as “ensar” were employed to frame migrants, creating a sense of tolerance among the public (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, pp.281–300). However, as socio-economic pressures increased and political polarization deepened, this initial humanitarian framing gradually shifted toward a more security-oriented narrative. After 2023, anti-migrant discourses in Türkiye particularly intensified during election campaigns. Some right-wing and nationalist parties targeted migrants using terms such as “silent invasion,” “demographic threat,” and “citizenship flood,” aiming to gain votes through promises of deportation (Yabancı, 2020, pp.345–366). These discourses circulated widely not only through political rallies but also through television debates, tabloid headlines, and social media platforms, amplifying exclusionary narratives and normalizing hostile attitudes toward migrants (Wodak, 2015, p.256). In addition,

media-produced expressions such as “public order disturbance,” “welfare strain,” and “loss of national identity” became recurring rhetorical tools that reinforced securitizing tendencies (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p.240). In the language used by political actors, terms like “illegal,” “occupier,” and “unauthorized” increasingly replaced “Syrians under temporary protection,” signaling a deliberate shift from administrative terminology to emotionally charged descriptors designed to provoke fear and resentment (De Genova, 2013, pp.1180–1198). This shift in discourse indicates that securitization has become widespread and systematic (Huysmans, 2006, p.140), operating simultaneously through political rhetoric, media framing, and public debates. As these narratives gained legitimacy, they also influenced migration governance by encouraging stricter border controls, expanded surveillance practices, and intensified deportation campaigns, illustrating how exclusionary discourse and policy formation reinforce one another (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014, pp.1–472).

1.9.The Role of Media and Public Perception

Mainstream media repeatedly covers the themes of violence, crime and public serenity. The highlights on social incidents are deliberately repetition of such categorizing language as “Afghan committed robbery,” “Syrian stabbed” or similar representations (Ibrahim, 2005, pp.185). Social media on the other hand, has a kind of catalyst effect on digital platforms such as Twitter/X and TikTok. Whether directly or indirectly, social media increase the social prejudices, counter-movements and make rightist political discourses much more visible.

In the sample of 2023 elections in Turkey, newspapers and news agencies published reports which were unverified claiming that migrants casted their votes, threw the rental market into turmoil and planned organized crimes. The disinformation process in question aroused public anxiety and fear, as well. Articles on newspapers tried to impose the idea that migrant occupation in labour market and the system of social security, and migrant-related loss of financial resources were natural result of the process. Such over-generalized, unverified and uncontrolled data evoked the public anger, so it altered the perceptions of the society irreversibly. It is not wrong to claim that the role of the traditional and social media is unavoidably influent and reshapes public perception related to migrant narratives.

2. Secondary Data Analysis and Discourse Analysis: Qualitative Research Methods

This study employs qualitative research methods to examine the relationship between migration and security through media discourses. In particular, secondary data analysis and discourse analysis were used. Secondary data analysis involves re-examining data previously produced by other institutions, researchers, or media organizations rather than generating new data. This method offers advantages in terms of time and cost and allows for long-term historical analysis. However, because the data were not originally produced for the research purpose, there are certain limitations regarding reliability and validity (Johnston, 2014, p.623).

Discourse analysis, on the other hand, acknowledges that language is not merely a communication tool but also a mechanism that reproduces social relations, ideologies, and power dynamics. Media content and political actors' discourses are analyzed to reveal how migrants are constructed as "the Other" and how securitization processes are framed (Fairclough, 1995, pp.54-56; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp.10-15).

The numbers of samples from national newspapers in Türkiye cover the time from 2015 to 2024, and this entire date range forms the primary dataset of the research. Due to the fact that accessing all materials in a holistic way is unapplicable, the samples include major newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet*. Since accessing the entire population was not feasible, the sample included major high-circulation newspapers in Turkey: *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Sözcü*. News articles about securitizations and migrations from 2015 to 2020 are included and analyzed within the context of discourse analysis, as this sub-period allows for a more detailed examination of the peak years in migration-related political and media debates within the broader 2015–2024 dataset. Furthermore, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's and the Ministry of Interiors' political rhetorics are covered within the analysis, across the whole 2015–2024 period, in order to trace the evolution of political discourse on migration.

To avoid potential confusion regarding the temporal scope of the data, it is important to clarify how the different time periods used in the study are analytically connected. The primary dataset consists of newspaper articles published between 2015 and 2024; however, within this broader timeframe, the years 2015–2020 were selected for a more detailed discourse analysis due to the heightened intensity of migration debates following the European Migration Crisis. In addition, the reference to the post-September 11 period (2001–2024) pertains not to the newspaper dataset but to the conceptual and theoretical background of global securitization trends. Thus, while the empirical analysis is based on media materials from 2015 to 2024, the broader historical

and theoretical discussion draws on the evolution of securitization from 2001 onward. This distinction ensures coherence between the empirical dataset and the theoretical framework.

This comprehensive methodological approach aims to examine the reflections of migration securitization in both media and political discourse and to reveal their impact on public perception. Data were collected from digital archives of the selected media outlets and official speeches of political actors. News was analyzed at the headline, lead, and text level, while political discourses were examined in terms of rhetoric and content.

The collected data were analyzed using discourse analysis. First, concepts, metaphors, and themes representing migrants were identified; then, the relationship of these themes to securitization discourse was determined. The resulting discourses were interpreted within the framework of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory.

This research also includes some limitations. First of all, references to the post-September 11 period and the years 2001–2024 are used only as conceptual background to discuss how global security paradigms evolved; the study does not analyze media materials from these years. For this reason, the empirical dataset is strictly limited to the period 2015–2024, and no media analysis was conducted for earlier periods. Furthermore, the duration between 2015 and 2024 presents challenges in analyzing each period. The date of the research which provide a limited numbers of media sources might not likely be homogeneous. It also limits the generalisation of the findings. Owing to the fact that discourse analysis is a kind of qualitative method which requires interpretative features, it may have the possibility of influencing the analysis of the researcher. Moreover, because of the contextual differences, comparing and contrasting contents in miscellaneous cultures and languages are too challenging to discuss. Finally, some technical issues such as the restrictions and limitations of digital resources may cause to an infertile assessment of data available for the research.

Metaphors, key concepts, oppositions, and narrative strategies used in media news were examined within the framework of Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1998). Migrants were constructed with metaphors such as “threat,” “burden,” “wave,” and “invasion” in news coverage (Fairclough, 1995, pp.58-65; Van Dijk, 1998, pp.33-41).

The discourse analysis was conducted in a single, systematic workflow as follows: The digital archives of four high-circulation national newspapers (Hürriyet, Sabah, Sözcü, Cumhuriyet), selected through purposive sampling and covering the years 2015–2024, were searched using keywords such as “migration,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” “security,” “threat,” “crisis,” and

“border.” In addition, speeches published during the same period by the Presidency and the Ministry of the Interior were included as supplementary data sources. The analysis proceeded in two stages. (1) In the first stage, open coding was conducted on the news items to identify recurring themes, metaphors, frames, and binary oppositions. (2) In the second stage, these codes were refined through axial coding and thematic grouping, and subsequently interpreted using Fairclough’s three-level critical discourse analysis framework (text, discursive practice, social practice) alongside Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach.

To enhance reliability, the researcher’s initial codes were reviewed by an independent coder, and disagreements were discussed and resolved. Qualitative data analysis software was used for data management and code organization (including code lists, citation counts, and thematic groupings), and the resulting thematic maps were examined by comparing them with both textual examples and policy practices (e.g., border measures, return procedures). This methodological approach aimed to systematically and reproducibly reveal the linguistic forms of discursive structures as well as their functions within processes of production and consumption.

3. International Migration Statistics

Global migration is no longer merely a demographic phenomenon. It has become a multifaceted process that directly affects states’ security policies, social structures, and international relations. The continuous rise in the number of international migrants and forcibly displaced persons is prompting states to reshape their border management practices, national identity frameworks, and social cohesion strategies. As a result, migration has become central to contemporary understandings of security. This situation necessitates addressing migration both within the framework of humanitarian protection and from a state-centered security perspective.

The tables presented in the study illustrate the growing scale of international migration, its regional distribution, and variations in refugee reception. These data show that migration is not only a matter of population movement but also a fundamental phenomenon shaping global politics and states’ security approaches.

The number of international migrants is increasing rapidly, as seen in Table 1. Wars, climate changes, economic inequalities and political suppression are the reasons of this rise. Migration has become an important phenomenon not only for the safety of migrants but also for the security

policies of the host countries. Migration goes hand in hand with the issue of social integration problems in terms of discrimination, xenophobia and tension in the societies.

Table 1:*Global Number of International Migrants (2000–2024)*

Year	International Migrants	World Population (%)
2000	173 million	2.8%
2010	220 million	3.2%
2020	281 million	3.6%
2023	295 million (estimate)	3.7%
2024	304 million	3.8%

Source: UN DESA (2024), IOM World Migration Report 2024

The number of international migrants continues to grow significantly, as seen in Table 2, and Europe, Asia, and North America can be seen as leader countries receiving migrants in big amounts. Charming features of the countries in question can be counted as the financial opportunities, stability and justice in policies. Such rising number of migrants might give rise to harsher policies and challenges for social harmony.

Table 2*Regions Hosting the Most Migrants (2024)*

Region	Number of International Migrants (2024)
Europe	94.1 million
Asia	92.2 million
North America	59 million

Africa	29.2 million
Latin America & Caribbean	17.5 million
Oceania	9 million

Source: UN DESA (2024), IOM World Migration Report 2024

The number of forcibly displaced individuals continues to rise dramatically, as seen in Table 3. These countries host large numbers of migrants due to the fact that they are close proximity of conflict zones and migration policies. This may arise the pressure on social services and naturally may increase the tension between locals and immigrants. The security enhancement and balance are major concerns of the countries.

Table 3

Countries Hosting the Most Refugees (2024)

Country	Number of Refugees
Turkey	3.6 million
Iran	3.4 million
Colombia	2.5 million
Germany	2.1 million
Pakistan	1.7 million
Uganda	1.5 million

Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2024a

The number of forcibly displaced persons has increased sharply over the past two decades, as seen in Table 4. Forced displacement has been rising due to war, internal conflict, human rights violations, and climate change. This creates security and human rights issues for individuals and social and security challenges for host communities.

Table 4*Number of Forcibly Displaced Persons (2000–2024)*

Year	Displaced Persons
2000	~22 million
2010	~41 million
2015	~65 million
2020	~89 million
2023	117 million
2024	122.6 million

Source: UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2024b

The number of refugees received by different countries varies significantly, as seen in Table 5, and this table highlights the selective approaches and double standards countries apply in refugee acceptance due to cultural and political concerns. Refugees from Ukraine are generally positively perceived, whereas Syrian refugees face more restrictive or negative discourses.

Table 5*Reception of Ukrainian and Syrian Refugees (2022–2023)*

Country/Region	Ukrainian Refugees	Syrian Refugees	Discursive Difference in Reception
Poland	1.6 million	<10.000	Positive discourse
Germany	1.1 million	600.000+	Selective discourse
France	118.000	30.000	Limited for Syrians
Turkey	<10.000	3.6 million	Overload discourse

4. Newspaper Reports on Migrants

4.1. Period 1: Post-September 11 (2001–2010)

News 1: Security Framing through 9/11 and Terrorism

“America’s New War: Terrorists Cross Our Borders” (CNN, October 2001)

Summary: The report claimed that some undocumented migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border could be linked to Al-Qaeda. Migrant movements were framed as threats to national security.

Analysis: The Copenhagen School’s analysis highlights how the securitization process frames migrants as existential threats, portraying them as both economic and cultural risks. This narrative amplifies the sense of danger, thereby justifying the implementation of state security measures. Following 2001, migrant entries into the U.S. declined by 20%, with annual unauthorized crossings reducing from 1.2 million to 700,000 by 2005 (Pew Research, 2010).

News 2: Internal Threat in Europe “Radicalizing Migrants”

“Europe’s New Terrorist Threat: Homegrown Radicals” (The Guardian, July 2005, post-London bombings)

Summary: Focuses on Muslim youth born in Europe radicalized into terrorism, arguing that these individuals suffered from an integration problem.

Analysis: Analyzed via the Copenhagen School, The Guardian’s report emphasizes that terrorism can also originate domestically. Through securitization, “homegrown radicals” are framed as security threats, portraying migrant communities as oppositional to societal norms. This discourse reinforces cultural alienation and legitimizes increased security measures. Between 2010–2020, Muslim immigrant numbers in EU countries increased by about 50%, triggering debates around “non integration” and “cultural threat” (Pew Research, 2020).

4.2. Period 2: 2010–2020 (Syrian Crisis, Terror Attacks, Migrant Crisis)

News 3: Refugee Crisis and “Hidden Terrorist” Discourse (2015–2016)

“Refugee Wave Brings ISIS Threat to Europe” (The Daily Mail, Nov 2015, post-Paris attacks)

Summary: There were allegations that some Syrian refugees included ISIS members, leading to criticism of Europe's border policies.

Analysis: Refugees are often perceived as potential threats, which serves to justify the implementation of heightened security measures. During 2015–2016, over 1.2 million Syrians arrived in Europe, leading 12 EU countries to temporarily suspend the Schengen free movement agreement (UNHCR, 2016; Frontex, 2017).

News 4: Gender-Based Securitization: Cologne Incident (2016)

“Germany’s New Fear: Syrian Men and Sex Attacks” (Bild, Jan 2016, post-New Year’s Eve)

Summary: Reports indicated that refugee men were involved in sexual assaults, highlighting cultural differences as a potential risk factor.

Analysis: The report associates Syrian men with sexual violence, portraying them as potential societal threats. In 2016, 70% of asylum applications in Germany were submitted by males. Following the incident, deportations and monitoring rose by 40% (BAMF, 2017).

4.3. Period 3: 2020–2024 (Pandemic, Ukraine War, Afghan Migration)

News 5: COVID-19 and Biosecurity Discourse

“Refugees Could Carry Virus: Borders Reconsidered” (Sabah, March 2020)

Summary: Migrants were perceived as a potential threat to public health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analysis: Refugees are often framed as health risks, reinforcing their marginalization and justifying the implementation of restrictive policies. In 2020, a total of 92 countries introduced temporary border closures to refugees according to the IOM. (IOM, 2020).

News 6: Ukraine Crisis and Ethnic Differential Discourse

“Welcome Ukrainians, Send Syrians Back” (Le Monde & Der Spiegel, 2022)

Summary: Support was provided to Ukrainian refugees, whereas Syrians encountered public hostility and unequal treatment.

Analysis: Ukrainian refugees were viewed as culturally similar and worthy of assistance, while Syrians were often portrayed as threats. This highlights the selective use of securitization and othering in both policy decisions and public attitudes.

Table 6*Discourse Change Overview*

Period	Main Discourse Frame
1950–1980	Ideological (Cold War), guest status, temporary
1990–2000	Ethnic/cultural closeness, economic competition
2001–2010	Terror–security discourse, cultural conflict
2011–2015	Shift from solidarity to crisis language
2016–2024	Populism, nationalism, “deportation” emphasis

Table 7*Securitization of Threats Over Time*

Period	Threat Type	Media Discourse	Copenhagen School Perspective
2001–2010	Terror Threat	Migrant = potential Al-Qaeda member	Existential threat discourse
2010–2020	Integration – Sexual Threat – Radicalism	Refugee = security risk	Justification for extraordinary policies
2020–2024	Health – Social cohesion – Ethnic discrimination	“Carries disease,” “Not like us”	Sectoral securitization + double standard

It can be argued that media discourses regarding migrants have a significant impact on societies' perceptions of security. Expressions in the media that present migrants as a threat can complicate social cohesion processes. The Copenhagen School's security theory emphasizes that security is not only an inter-state issue but also a process that shapes social structures and affects

everyday life. In this context, media discourses play an important role in the formation of security perceptions.

News in Turkish and European media portrays migrants as a kind of “security threat,” while at other times highlights the social difficulties they face. However, some of these reports depict migrants as “marginalized” individuals, directly influencing societal perceptions of security. In this context, it can be argued that media has a key role in either stressing or underestimate security threats related to migrants. In such an environment, migrants inevitably experience discrimination and insecurity both in their places of residence and within the broader social order. The theory of securitization, presented by the Copenhagen School, covers a valuable framework for comprehension of the impact of media on social dynamics. It gives the facility to analyze the reasons of security issues which enable much more comprehensive and inclusive approach to the matter.

5. Findings

5.1. Statistical Data in Relation to Security

5.1.1. Global Inclination

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2024, more than 117 million people worldwide have been affected in terms of displacement. This represents an approximate 75% increase compared to 2015 (UNHCR, 2024a). This dramatic rise reflects not only escalating conflicts but also the widening gap between global displacement patterns and the capacity of international protection mechanisms (UNHCR, 2024b). European surveys indicate that in EU-member-countries, individuals of 48 percentage associate migration concept with “security problem” (Eurobarometer, 2023). This shift demonstrates how migration has increasingly moved from a humanitarian domain to a security-framed public perception, consistent with securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998). Counter-migrant rightist parties have reached the ratio of 27 percentage across Europe such as AfD in Germany, SD in Sweeden and Lega in Italy (Mudde, 2023). These parties consistently frame migration within narratives of cultural preservation, demographic decline, and border insecurity, thus reinforcing the normalization of security-based interpretations of migration (Wodak, 2021).

European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) have stated that illegal crossing of migrants to the borders in EU was almost 330.000 and it was the highest rate for the past five years

(Frontex, 2023). This rise has led to growing investment in border surveillance technologies, biometric identification systems, and deterrence-oriented policies, illustrating how security logic increasingly shapes border governance structures (Guild et al., 2020). Such institutionalization aligns with the Copenhagen School's claim that once a topic is securitized discursively, it becomes subsequently embedded in policy, bureaucracy, and administrative practice (Buzan et al., 1998). The discourses of rightist movements and parties have focused upon the preservation of the borders. As for the United States, the Pew Research Center has reported that the population of migrants have increased to 46.2 million in 2023 and it covers 14 percentage of whole population of the country. The political debate surrounding migration in the U.S. has intensified, particularly concerning border militarization, asylum restrictions, and state-level measures that frame migration as a threat to internal stability (Nevins, 2020). The same situation in Latin American and Asian countries are available and it become major issue in political debates. In Latin America, Venezuelan displacement has generated cross-border tensions, prompting host countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Brazil to adopt increasingly security-oriented policies (Freier, Berganza & Blouin, 2022). In Asia, states including Malaysia, India, and Thailand have tightened migration regulations and, in some cases, have reframed refugee populations—such as the Rohingya—as potential security risks (Uddin, 2021).

Taken together, these global trends indicate that migration has undergone a profound process of securitization at the international level. Rising displacement figures, the political empowerment of right-wing parties, and the expansion of border-control mechanisms collectively demonstrate that migration is no longer regarded solely as a socio-economic or humanitarian issue. Instead, it has become embedded within national security agendas, shaping public discourse, state responses, and political alignments across regions (Huysmans, 2006).

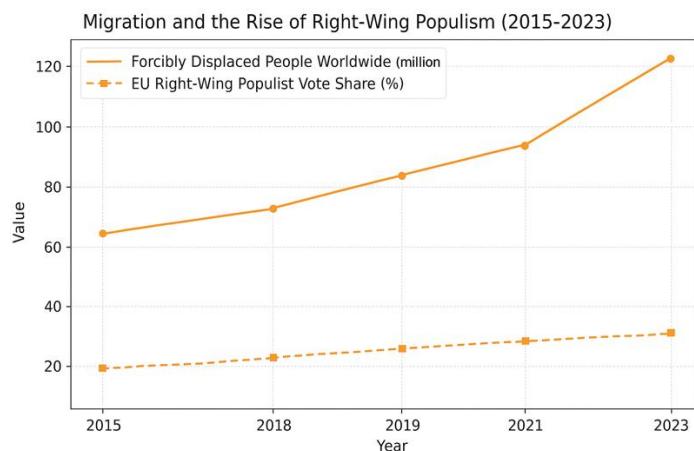
5.1.2. Turkey-Specific Data

According to the Presidency of Migration Management in Türkiye, approximately 3.1 million Syrians and around 1 million irregular migrants from Asian countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan currently live under temporary protection in Türkiye. A survey conducted by KONDA shows that 72 percent of society believes that migrants pose a potential threat to public order. Another survey conducted by TESEV indicates that, either directly or indirectly, local election campaigns in the 2023 elections addressed the issue of migration (TESEV, 2024). Moreover, one of the central themes associated with the elections has been Syrian migration, often referred to as

“election engineering.” Recent academic studies demonstrate that migration debates in Türkiye have increasingly been framed within a security-oriented perspective, particularly in the post-2020 period, and that the media has become one of the primary actors reproducing these securitizing discourses (Buz, 2020; Efe, 2019). In this process, both mainstream media and social media platforms have produced narratives that portray migrants in relation to public order, economic burden, and cultural threat (Özcan, 2021). Such discursive constructions reflect broader patterns of securitization consistent with the Copenhagen School framework.

When theoretical and statistical data are evaluated together, it becomes evident that the securitization of migration has evolved not only as a discursive process but also as an institutional and administrative one. For example, intensified border-security measures targeting irregular migration, the expansion of removal centers, and the tightening of control mechanisms directed at migrants constitute concrete policies that reinforce the institutional dimension of securitization (İçduygu & Yıldız, 2019; İçduygu & Millet, 2016). This process does not merely regulate individuals; it also constrains rights-based policy approaches.

Decisions regarding migrants’ rights and status are increasingly shaped through security-centered frameworks rather than legal ones. This shift disrupts the balance between international protection standards and national security priorities—usually to the detriment of migrants—and weakens the effective implementation of legal safeguards (Memişoğlu, 2021). Additionally, the use of migration-related discourse as a populist political instrument pushes rights-based approaches into the background (Kaya, 2020). This dynamic contributes to weakened social cohesion and deepens polarization in the public sphere. Indeed, public opinion research shows that anti-migrant sentiments—linked to both economic crises and cultural anxieties—have risen and that this increase has been systematically used by political actors as part of their electoral strategies (Erdoğan, 2023; Aydın, 2022).

Graphic 1.*Migration and the Rise of Populism (2015–2023)*

The chart shows that between 2015 and 2023, the increase in the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide parallels the rise in the vote shares of right-wing populist parties in Europe. This indicates how the securitization of migration is linked to the strengthening of right-wing ideologies in the political sphere.

5.1.3. Empirical Expansion: Recent Statistics

Securitization processes are becoming increasingly evident on a global scale. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2023, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has exceeded 117 million. This figure is nearly double the 65 million recorded in 2015 (UNHCR, 2023).

During the same period, significant increases were also observed in the vote shares of right-wing populist parties in Europe. For example:

In Germany, the AfD's vote share rose from 4% in 2015 to 22% in 2023.

In France, Marine Le Pen's party RN received 41% of the vote in the 2022 presidential election.

In Italy, the right-wing coalition led by Giorgia Meloni came to power in 2022.

These data illustrate how migration crises have strengthened right-wing ideologies in the political arena and how the issue of migration has been instrumentalized within a security-focused framework.

The discourse analysis in this study has shown that how migrants are presented on media within the framework of securitization processes. The analysis focuses on national newspapers published in Türkiye between 2015 and 2024 (Hürriyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Sözcü) as well as official reports from governmental institutions. One may claim that migrants are associated with generic terms of security, crime, cultural threat, humanitarian crisis, and media manipulation.

Table 8*Discourse Themes in Turkey (2015–2024)*

Theme	Example Discourse	Ideological Function
Security	“Migrants disrupt social order” (Argın, 2021)	Frames migration as an extraordinary problem; securitizes it
Crime & Criminalization	“Syrian stabbed someone” (İbrahim, 2005)	Associates migration with crime; generates societal fear
Economic Threat/ Burden	“They take jobs while citizens are unemployed” (Tahincioğlu, 2020)	Justifies anti-migrant policies through economic concerns
Cultural Identity / Othering	“Migrants disrupt cultural homogeneity”	Reinforces national identity and social division
Political Instrumentalization	“Anti-migrant measures must be taken”	Populist framing; migration as a political tool
Humanitarian Crisis / Victimhood	“Refugee tragedy” (Eşiyok, 2020)	Highlights vulnerability; appeals to humanitarian concern
Media Discourse & Manipulation	“Migrants presented as potential criminals, burden, or threat”	Legitimizes securitization via media

Migrants are represented as multidimensional security threats. Security, crime, and economic burden dominate, while cultural threat and political instrumentalization reinforce the ideological component.

The results of our study align with existing research on the increasing securitization of migration in Turkey. The portrayal of migrants in the media using concepts such as “threat,” “burden,” and “invasion” supports the findings of Gönültaş and Mulvey (2023), who show that the media reinforces discrimination by amplifying perceptions of threat. It also corresponds with Wodak’s (2015, 2021) analysis that right-wing populist discourse generates fear to secure public support. Our research is further consistent with Demirkol’s (2022, 2024) argument that migration-related discourse is employed as a security-oriented political tool. The original contribution of this study lies in its combined examination of media discourse and political discourse as a time series between 2015 and 2024. In doing so, the interaction between media and politics—typically analyzed separately in the literature—is presented holistically. Moreover, by demonstrating how securitizing language is reflected in implementation-level policies such as border security measures, return centers, and strict control mechanisms, the study provides concrete evidence of the institutional dimension of Buzan and colleagues’ (1998) securitization model within the Turkish context.

The study offers a comprehensive analytical framework that brings together Fairclough’s and Van Dijk’s models to examine textual features, discursive practices, and ideological structures simultaneously. In this respect, it illuminates not only how media discourse is presented but also how it is produced and how it resonates with the public. The literature also shows that international developments influence discourse in Turkey (Freier et al., 2022; Uddin, 2021). While our findings confirm this relationship, they also demonstrate that domestic political dynamics—such as elections and economic uncertainty—play a decisive role in shaping discourse, adding a new dimension to internationally focused studies in the field.

In conclusion, our study contributes to the literature by addressing the securitization of migration in Turkey at both discursive and institutional levels. Future research would benefit from incorporating social media data, local press analysis, and quantitative methods.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, global migration movements have increased, particularly after September 11, 2001, intertwining with security discourses and creating a new social and political perception space. In this process, migrants have been constructed, within the framework of many states’ security policies, not only as economic or cultural “others” but also as potential threats to national security. This transformation gains further significance when evaluated within the context of the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory. According to the Copenhagen School, a

phenomenon becomes “securitized” when political actors present it as an existential threat and society accepts this framing (Buzan, Wæver & De Wilde, 1998). In this context, the representation of migrants as threats by media, politics, and public opinion is a product of security construction at the discursive level.

The discourse analysis in the study shows that Western-oriented media organs connect migrants with negative connotations such as “invasion,” “crisis,” “burden,” and “crime.” Van Dijk (1998) notes that such discourses play a key role in the construction of public perception, instruments of social control for dominant groups, finally reproduce misjudgements of the majority of society. Moreover, discourses of media and policy makers do not solely affect the social perception but also enhance the discrimination, xenophobia, and societal polarization. This discursive practice marginalizes immigrants.

The Copenhagen School’s security theory emphasizes that security should be addressed not only at the military or state level but also at individual and societal levels. Accordingly, migrants—who relocate to escape life-threatening conditions—necessitate a redefinition of security. To manage migration in relation to social cohesion, it is important to develop inclusive social services at the local level, multilingual education policies, and programs in housing and employment. Putnam’s (2007) concept of “social capital” suggests that building trust and solidarity bridges between different social groups can replace exclusionary, security-based approaches with social integration.

Collaborations between academia, media, and politics can ensure that migration and security issues are discussed on a healthier platform, while the media can be encouraged to produce informative and empathy-based content rather than dramatic or fear-inducing narratives. Implementing international burden-sharing will allow migration to be addressed as a collective challenge. As emphasized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023), global migration movements should be managed within a framework of solidarity and responsibility.

In conclusion, migration—as a permanent reality of modern societies—should be managed not through restrictive, security-centered policies but through human rights-based strategies that prioritize social integration. The Copenhagen School’s securitization theory enables us to analyze how migrants are coded as threats at the discursive level, while also highlighting the need to reverse this perception. The solution lies in constructing a new paradigm that views migration not as a crisis but as an opportunity for mutual learning, cultural enrichment, and social transformation.

This study, which analyzes how media discourse securitizes the phenomenon of migration, integrates the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School with empirical findings to reveal how migration is constructed as an “existential threat” at the discursive level. In the discourse analysis process, the portrayal of migrants using metaphors such as “invasion,” “crisis,” “burden,” “threat,” and “crime” reflects, as Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) argue, the concrete manifestation of migration being framed as a security threat by political and social actors. As Van Dijk (1998) emphasizes, such discourses are not merely linguistic practices but also powerful mechanisms that shape social perceptions and legitimize exclusionary policies.

The criminalization strategies identified in media reports—together with the framing of contrasts and the dramatization of events—interact with the security-based discourse of political actors to reinforce the perception of migrants as a potential threat within society. In this process, securitizing discourses are repeatedly reproduced both at the level of social perception and within institutional practices. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that media organizations adopt a human rights-centered approach to journalism, while policymakers balance security-oriented strategies with perspectives that prioritize social cohesion and inclusivity. It is also noted that future research would benefit from further examining social media discourses and conducting cross-country comparative analyses. However, factors such as the study’s reliance on a limited sample of newspapers, the inherently interpretive nature of qualitative discourse analysis, and gaps in digital archives constitute limitations that affect the generalizability of the findings.

In conclusion, while this study demonstrates how migration is securitized through media and political discourse, it also offers a strong framework for transforming this process through more human-centered, inclusive, and holistic policy approaches.

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