



Cultural Drivers of Radicalization

Turkey/D5.1 Country Report

May 2021

Hasret Dikici Bilgin and Nazlı Özekici

Istanbul Bilgi University



© Hasret Dikici Bilgin, Nazlı Özekici

Reference: D.RAD D5.1

This research was conducted under the Horizon 2020 project 'De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-integrate' (959198).

The sole responsibility of this publication lies with the author. The European Union is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: hasret.dikici@bilgi.edu.tr; nazli.ozekici@bilgi.edu.tr

This document is available for download at <https://dradproject.com/>

Table of Contents

About the Project.....	4
Executive Summary/Abstract	5
List of Abbreviations.....	7
1. Introduction	8
2. Methodology.....	9
3. Media Landscape of Radicalization in Turkey	10
4. Analysis of the Representation, Circulation and Consumption Context of the Media Object.....	13
5. Conclusion	177
Appendices	18
References and Sources.....	20

About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalization and polarization in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalization, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualizes this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarization) with the goal of moving towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalization programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalization, which include a sense of being victimized; a sense of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures; and coming under the influence of "us vs them" identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs, and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion, and de-radicalization.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation-states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalization often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analyzing, and devising solutions to online radicalization will be central to the project's aims.

Executive Summary/Abstract

This report aims to analyze the cultural drivers of radicalization connected to the I-GAP index (injustice, grievance, alienation) with a focus on the mainstreaming of radicalization through digital channels in Turkey. It takes anti-refugee attitudes towards the Syrian population as a key component of contemporary radicalization in Turkey. The report specifically asks how social media communication mainstreams racism beyond the social cleavages and polarization.

The report builds on a debate about the key elements of contemporary radicalization in Turkey. The media landscape in Turkey has been polarized historically, reflecting the government-opposition competition; and the mainstream media has frequently been used by previous as well as current governments with a vilifying discourse on politically constructed others. Anti-refugee attitude forms a valuable example in this respect, as it has become a new battlefield of political competition in recent years. While the pro-government media frames refugees as victimized brothers in religion as the ruling party portrays its policies as a success, opposition tackles the issue on grounds of social and economic ramifications for the local population. The contemporary media landscape reflects such polarization.¹ However, with the extension of the stay of the Syrian migrants in Turkey, anti-refugee attitude expanded beyond partisan belongings and acquired a cross-cleavage dimension. In such a context, this report traces how social media mainstreams anti-refugee attitude beyond political polarization. We presume that the opposition media's anti-refugee attitude is affiliated with the issue ownership; therefore, the detection of the anti-refugee attitude in the pro-government media provides potentially more insights into the mainstreaming of racism despite the official framing of the refugee issue of victimized brothers in religion. Hence, we analyze two videos produced by a pro-government media organisation, Ahsen TV. In this way, we explore our argument that even pro-government media mainstreams racism against the refugees despite the officially stated government policy doing otherwise and despite the fact that the government accuses the opposition of taking a racist stance against the Syrians in Turkey.

The two videos analyzed dated July 28, 2019 and March 4, 2020 are produced for two occasions: the decision of the Istanbul governorate to repatriate the Syrians in Istanbul to the cities they originally registered on arrival; and the government's decision to remove the control over the Greek border for the passing of the refugees. We find that the official discourse of religious solidarity fails to convince the people, Syrian and Turkish alike. In other words, polarization appears as a dominant aspect on the videos and their comments. Polarization is nurtured by the feelings of injustice, grievance, and alienation. The injustice, grievance, and alienation in the videos, however, are mostly voiced by the locals rather than the refugees. In fact, the

¹ In this report, the term polarization refers to the contemporary trend of politicized conflict on multiple levels in Turkey.

mediated message implies that refugees are the root cause of injustice, grievance, and alienation. The Syrian respondents on the video are deliberately chosen as young able-bodied men “who should have fought at the war in Syria”, contributing to the mythmaking around the refugees and mainstreaming racism beyond social cleavages, without directly criticizing government policies. Viewers also observe how the videos steal the voice of the refugees with leading questions, statements likely to be deliberately left unsubstantiated, and even those accusing other refugees rather than the government policies.

List of Abbreviations

AA- Anadolu Ajansı (Anadolu Agency)

AKP- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – Republican People’s Party)

PKK- Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê

TRT- Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu (Turkish Radio and Television Cooperation)

1. Introduction

The D.5.1 report on Turkey aims to analyze the mainstreaming of radicalization through digital platforms. The report studies anti-refugee attitude as a key component of radicalization in contemporary Turkey through its media representation and consumption. It specifically asks how the social media mainstreams racism beyond the social cleavages and polarization. It connects the cultural drivers of radicalization to the D-Rad's conceptual framework, I-GAP (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarization) spectrum and the vulnerability index.

The Turkish media landscape has been historically polarized, reflecting the government-opposition competition; and the mainstream media has been used by the previous as well as the current governments with a vilifying discourse. Anti-refugee attitude in this respect forms a valuable case. On the one hand, the government AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party) utilizes the Syrian refugees in Turkey in both domestic and foreign policy, constructs the refugee issue to promote the image of the ruling party and its Islamized socio-economic order. The refugee policy serves for the purpose of establishing Turkey as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world with its strength and benevolence, which also underlines the domestic image that the government party has the power to grant to the Muslims in need. The opposition CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – Republican People's Party) responds to the concerns of the secular population, who feel frustrated by the Islamization, economic deprivation, and the aggressive foreign policy, which found body in the image of the Syrians. In a way, what is deprived from the local population economically and politically appears to be granted to the Syrians and the Syrians are considered as pro-government by definition. The contemporary media landscape reflects this polarization. As an issue ownership, the fact that the AKP government portrays the open-door policy to the Syrians as a policy success moderates the pool media's refugee coverage and limits it to the discourse of victimized brothers in religion. The media organs closer to the opposition, which approached Palestinians and the Iraqis in the past with a rather favourable attitude, build upon the social and economic ramifications of the government policy towards the Syrian refugees on the local population. On the other hand, the extended stay of the Syrians in Turkey mingled with the exacerbating economic and political conditions expanded the negative perceptions to the wider sections beyond the partisan sympathies.

In this context, our report points out that both pro-government and opposition media unites in their anti-refugee attitude despite the general atmosphere of polarization. The official policy regarding the Syrians remains the same. However, the government sources are also aware of the fact that the extended stay of the refugees created resentment in the local population beyond the party belongings, as research indicates (Erdoğan and Uyan-Semerçi 2018; Erdoğan 2020). Hence, the government responds through its media platforms by reiterating the claim that the government did the right

thing by giving refuge to the Syrians and indirectly puts the blame on the Syrians that the negative consequences are allegedly caused by some refugees. In other words, the government media acknowledges and absorbs the anti-refugee attitude yet directs the responsibility elsewhere. For this reason, we analyze two videos to show that cultural radicalization in the form of anti-refugee attitude is mainstreamed even by the pro-government sources despite the official policy.

We begin with discussing the contemporary context of radicalization in Turkey and outline the media landscape with a specific focus on the historical role of media in vilifying the politically constructed others and the emergence of the pro-government pool media. We then analyze the media objects with respect to the representation of the Syrian refugees as victims and self-destructive passive agents and making of the audience whose frustration is led towards the refugees rather than the government policy. We conclude with a discussion of the main findings.

2. Methodology

In this context, the report asks how the social media representation of refugees mainstreams racism in Turkey beyond the polarization and social cleavages. We presume that the opposition media's anti-refugee attitude is affiliated with the issue ownership; therefore, detection of the anti-refugee attitude in the pro-government media provides potentially more insights into the mainstreaming of racism despite the official framing of the refugee issue. In other words, we hypothesize that depicting the subtle manifestation of anti-refugee attitude in the pro-government media, despite the official discourse, enables us to understand how the media mainstreams anti-refugee attitude beyond the extant polarization and clearly distinct issue ownership.

In this perspective, the report is based on an analysis of two videos from the same media content owner, the Ahsen TV. The videos are produced for two occasions: the decision of the Istanbul governorate to repatriate the Syrians in Istanbul to the cities that they originally registered on arrival; and the government's decision to remove the control over the Greek border for the passing of the refugees. The repatriation decision was an attempt by the government to ease the tensions between the refugees and the local population in Istanbul without re-tracking on the official line. The refugees were registered in the first city that they applied to the public authority, but they went to Istanbul because smaller cities did not provide a social environment in which the refugees can blend in the crowd and find jobs. Repatriation to the smaller cities aimed to encourage the refugees to leave Turkey. The decision to remove the strict control over the Greek border was more direct. On the one hand, it re-emphasize the bargaining advantage of Turkey over the European Union through the refugees reiterating the power of Turkey. On the other hand, it would ease the society with the expectation that the refugee population will decrease again without changing the government policy.

We focus on how a pro-government content producer represents the two government decisions which seemingly go against the original open-door policy regarding Syrian migration without criticizing the government; how the videos steal the voices of the refugees to maintain the victim image of the Syrians with an underlying subtle accusation against them that the dire living conditions are their own making. We also analyze the comments section to outline the audience-making and media consumption around the refugee issue.

3. Media Landscape of Radicalization in Turkey

Radicalization has been an important characteristic of the Turkish politics since its inception in 1923. Nationality was defined in civic terms based on some kind of consent to be integrated to the new republican rule. However, the palatable citizen is constructed around ethnic Turkishness, and Sunni Muslimness (Kirişçi 2000, 18). This gives us an idea about the deep historical roots of ethno-nationalist radicalization; and the appeal of the left-wing radical groups to the Alevi minority in Turkey. Sunni Muslimness has been further refined with a secular perspective that demarcated the spheres of the state and the religion in bold and put the religion under the strict control of the state. In other words, practice of religion and its public visibility has been highly regulated. This policy pushed those groups, especially the religious orders (*tariqats*) who did not follow the state sanctioned framework to the periphery of the political system. The response to the rising leftist politics in the Cold War context further complicated the political landscape. Ultra-nationalist groups have been supported by the state organizations, particularly for their activities targeting the leftist, Alevi and Kurdish groups. Although the official hard-line secularist policies remained at the discursive level, activities of the *tariqats* in the working-class neighbourhoods, which were the leftist strongholds at the time became permissible, even desirable in the post-coup environment of 1980s with the introduction of the new official ideology referred as the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (Kurt 2010).

In the contemporary period, which spans the five AKP governments since 2002, all four types of radicalization mentioned above continue to prevail. The AKP governments pursued a de-radicalization policy towards the ethnonationalist radicalization until 2015, however, the Kurdish opening process failed (Kayhan Pusane 2014). Political violence resurfaced in a cross-border nature with the increased Kurdish insurgency activity in northern Syria, several Kurdish politicians and activists were imprisoned and the legal ethnic party in the parliament faces trial for closure. Expansion of the permissible space for religion evolved in a state-led Islamization policy in this period (Yesilada and Rubin 2013; Şen 2010; A. Kaya 2015), with a renewed nationalist dimension (Z. N. Kaya and Whiting 2019; Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015) and intensified sectarianism (Karakaya-Stump 2018). Since 2010, this context has acquired a new element, blurring the boundaries of distinct types of radicalization: the anti-refugee attitude.

Turkey adopted an open-door policy towards the Syrian migrants in 2011 characterized by the elements of Islamized domestic and foreign policy. The temporary protection framework extended preferential aid to the ethnically Arab and devout Sunni Syrians (Korkut 2016). The amended citizenship legislation provided privileged access to the skilled and/or wealthy migrants (Akcapar and Simsek 2018), while the rest mostly work informally for meager salaries without proper papers (Göksel 2018; Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017). Domestically, the Syrian migrants policy is marketed in a way, which constructs Turkey as a leading regional actor who helps those in need in lieu with an Islamic connotation (Karakaya Polat 2018; Balkılıç and Teke Lloyd 2020; A. Kaya 2020). Making of the Syrian policy along Islamic lines apparently intended to create a favorable public opinion among the electoral base of the part, however, it also led to a resentment among the Kurdish, Alevi and, in general, secular groups that it will contribute further to the closing of the political space and oppression of the oppositional groups (Saraçoğlu and Belanger 2019). The considerable initial sympathy and religious solidarity after the initial period almost disappeared; discrimination and negative attitudes towards the Syrians increased across all sections of the society (M. M. Erdoğan 2020). In other words, as the stay of the Syrian migrants extended, anti-refugee sentiments (Ozduzen, Korkut, and Ozduzen 2020) attained a cross-cleavage dimension, which also manifests itself in the converging media representation despite the divergence of the media ownership. The re-admission deal between Turkey and the EU failed to deal with the rise of the anti-refugee attitude in Turkey.

The media in Turkey proliferated since 1990s as the monopoly of the state media was annulled. Commercialization of the media contributed to the emergence of a relatively open environment as the opportunities for alternative information resources increased. However, even in the 1990s, the government control and the influence of party politics continued (R. Kaya and Çakmur 2010). In other words, coercive measures such as closing and banning media activity declined; while the government and business control over the media continued with more subtle and non-coercive strategies, which can be referred as media capture. AKP period, in this context, oscillated between coercive and non-coercive strategies, evolving towards full coercion since 2011 and especially after 2015. The decree laws since the abortive coup of 2016 enabled the government to shut down the media outlets, confiscate their properties and prosecute journalists (Yeşil 2018, 251). Alongside the coercive measures, disciplinary capture became increasingly common through media ownership and making loyalty as the basic criterion for the access to the political and economic resources.

Extension of clientelism to the government-media relations led to the emergence of a pool media. The pool media comprises of the state TV TRT, official news agency AA (*Anadolu Ajansı*) as well as the private media organs such as Sabah, Hürriyet and CNNTürk. The state owned media organs TRT and AA became party propaganda organs as the party-affiliated journalists filled the administrative ranks (Irak 2016). The private media organs frame the economic and political news in the same way as the public media outlets, indicating the level of the fusion of the financial interests of the

business and the political interests of the government (Karlıdağ and Bulut 2016). The mainstream media (state and commercial alike) once again became an ideological state apparatus, to the level of omitting mass scale protests and oppositional voices from the daily broadcast. Citizen journalism and the use of social media for getting and disseminating political information 2013 onwards (Jenzen et al. 2021) can thus be explained on the grounds of the consolidation of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey. The alternative media's do-it-yourself news coverage aims to disseminate the oppositional demands and arguments and respond to defamation (Ataman and Çoban 2018). On the other hand, the government resources use both conventional media resources and organize political trolls to bolster pro-government narratives, reduce the visibility of the alternative voices and keep the opposition under surveillance (Saka 2018). Platform censorship on social media outlets such as Twitter and Wikipedia also takes place from time to time via court orders, especially when the social media is used to publicize misconduct and corruption allegations towards the party leadership (Akser 2018).

It should be acknowledged that the mainstream media in Turkey even after its commercialization in 1990s preserved its connections to the governments and the party politics. In this way, the dominant forces in the government and the state bureaucracy managed to utilize the media organs around a vilifying discourse. This discourse manifested itself in several incidents in the period before the AKP governments concerning the Kurdish issue, crimes against the minorities and the anti-government protests (Gencil Bek 2014). The polarization in the media between the pro-government and opposition outlets reflect the conventional political competition. In the contemporary period, hence, the political battle over the media manifests itself on the case of the Syrian migrants reflecting the political polarization. The official discourse constructs the image of the Syrians in Turkey as brothers in religion, who are vulnerable and needy (mazlum), who will return to their homeland eventually without any promise of equal citizenship or any agency. The official account blames both the Syrian regime and the PKK (and affiliated organizations in northern Syria) for the migration influx and creates a combined narrative of relief from oppression, examples of religious charity and downplay of the dire living circumstances. There are various examples of media content production by the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Defense, national state channel TRT and pro-government conservative charity associations in this direction.² The dominant tone of the pro-government media is one of control and understates the socio-economic problems the migrants are suffering in Turkey (Şenol Sert and Daniş 2021). The oppositional media production appears to associate the issues related to the Syrian migration with the government agenda (Karakuş and Göktuna Yaylacı 2015). Both pro-government and opposition media converge on their treatment of the Syrians as victims (Sunata and Yıldız 2018); however, the opposition media points out to the government's policy failure which victimizes the Syrians and the local Turkish population alike. Beneath the shared

² A few examples can be found in the following: (Hüdayi Vakfı 2018; TRT Avaz 2016; T.C. Millî Savunma Bakanlığı 2020).

identification of the Syrians as victims, there are also common blaming and discriminatory representations. Media representation of the Syrians often emerge as coward and lazy Syrian men leaving the fight against the Syrian regime to the Turkish soldiers and the responsibility to provide for their families to the Turkish people, predatory males targeting Turkish women, and almost always as criminals (Narlı, Özaşçılar, and Turkan İpek 2020).

The media landscape, in this regard, connects well to the D.Rad's conceptual framework, I-GAP (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarization) spectrum and the vulnerability index. Class and gender-based inequality continues to be a persistent problem in Turkey (Buğra 2018). The myths around the Syrians in Turkey claim that they benefit from financial aid and free healthcare (T24 2015) at an extent that the Turkish citizens cannot access, and enjoying themselves at the beaches (Hürriyet 2016). This translates into the feelings of injustice, grievance and alienation that the Turkish people continue to live in poverty while the public resources go to the Syrians. The pictures placing the Turkish people digging into the rubbish bins to find food next to the Syrians in line for getting their salaries from the postal office circulate widely under the Twitter hashtag of #ÜlkemdeSuriyeliistemiyorum. The economic aspect of the justice claims overlaps with the symbolic/cultural and political claims. The new year celebration of the Syrians in Istanbul's famous Taksim square met with public resentment in a way that the Taksim area usurped from the secular Turkish people granted to the Syrians (Ozduzen 2020). Similarly, the beaches and leisure areas at the seaside are claimed as places that the Syrians should not enter as their leisure is seen as something that came at the expense of the dead bodies of the Turkish soldiers (TwiTube TV 2018). The closing of the political space adds to the resentment. Amidst electoral fraud and manipulation allegations in the municipality elections, DIY videos started to be circulated claiming that the Syrians would cast vote, with an implicit underlying claim that those votes would go to the government party (İstanbul Times TV Özel 2018). In this way, the media representation and consumption nurture the multilevel feelings of injustice, grievance, alienation from one's own country and ideological polarization, reproducing the negative image of the Syrian migrants as criminals and good-for-nothing freeloaders. The mythmaking (that "they" live in undeserved and prosperous conditions) and the polarization (that "we" die in their war, and "we" live in undeserved and dismal conditions), in this way, reinforce xenophobia and racism cutting across the politicized cleavages.

4. Analysis of the Representation, Circulation and Consumption Context of the Media Object

Mainstreaming racism through the media representation in the Turkish case transformed the issue of the Syrian refugees in Turkey into a securitized socio-economic problem beyond the political alignments. The DIY videos circulating on the social media depicting the Syrians as criminals and at best social burdens are produced by a range of citizen journalists with diverse political views judged by their

other media products in their accounts. We also further know that the opposition parties tend to securitize the refugee issue as part of their criticism of the government policies (Gülmez 2019; Dikici Bilgin 2017). In order to respond to the question of how the social media representation of the refugees mainstreams racism beyond the social cleavages and party alignments, we looked at the pro-government media ownership and their content on the Syrians in Turkey. Given that the official discourse depicts the Syrians as the vulnerable brothers in religion, we presume that the pro-government media production would create negative, defamatory, and criminalizing representation of the refugees only if racism has become a mainstream and “normal” attitude through the cultural drivers of radicalization.

We chose two YouTube videos produced by the same pro-government media outlet filmed after two symbolic government decisions regarding the Syrian migrants. The first one is a video uploaded on July 28, 2019 (Ahsen TV 2019), comprising a series of street interviews about the decision of the Istanbul governorate to expatriate the Syrians from Istanbul to the provinces they were registered (Çelik and Meriç 2019). This decision at the time was seen as an indirect measure to expatriate the Syrians out of Turkey as many of them were not even registered to any province and those registered to the other cities had come to Istanbul because they could not earn a living in other cities. The second one, uploaded on March 4, 2020 (Ahsen TV 2020), is another street interview video made after the decision of the government to lift the border control between Turkey and Greece for the passage of the refugees (BBC News Türkçe 2020). In both events, the government took measures to push the Syrian migrants out of Turkish soil contrary to the official discourse of religious solidarity. The video producer Ahsen TV, is a pro-government Islamist media outlet, rebranded from Ehli Sünnet TV; and an affiliate of Akit TV, which serves as the government mouthpiece. The Ahsen TV and its lead journalist’s media content is considered as a symbolic example of the popularization of Sunni Islam. The speaking style of the lead journalist with frequent Islamic references and gestures, his Islamic clothing (allegedly preferred by a certain tariqat), his choice of the respondents, directing leading questions and slightly mocking responses to lighting the mood seem as performative ideological acts (Arıkan 2016). Previous research on the overall media content of the producer concluded that Ahsen TV aims to create audiences and feed information to its followers as part of the government propaganda (Madenöğlü 2016).

The first video films the interviews with people on the move, either at the entrance of subway or at a bus stop. Although it is titled as “What do the Syrians think about the Expatriation of the Syrians [to their originally registered provinces]?”, only 2 out of 20 interviews are conducted with the Syrians. Both Syrians are decently dressed, and good-looking young men interviewed separately. Both declare that they are registered to Istanbul, and both mention that it was the right decision; the Syrians should go to their registered provinces as Istanbul was very crowded. The first one also elaborates that the unregistered Syrians do bad³ things. 7 of the Turkish respondents are young

³ The respondent uses the adjective “pislik” which can be translated as filthy.

and middle-aged women, only 2 of them veiled. 11 male Turkish respondents are also young and middle-aged; seemingly from lower class backgrounds.

The dominant discourse on the video is highly militarist, emphasizing that “they” did not fight for their own country while “we” did. The myths that we come across on other videos at social media are also visible that they benefit from the hospitals for free and enjoy themselves at the beaches and the parks. The myths are followed by the cultural claims that “their” and “our” culture are incompatible, “we are alienated in our country and the city”. The word cloud visualization reflects this claim to the city: “Istanbul”, “ours” (bizim), “they should go” (Annex 1). The Turkish respondents are portrayed as hard-working citizens, in the rush of getting somewhere. In one of the scenes, while a respondent talks about the Syrians enjoying themselves on the beaches, we see a black man with an airpod and smoking at the bus stop right behind the respondent. The video apparently reaches its audience. The commentators notice the black man at the background; and, that the Syrians themselves speak ill of the other Syrians. They consume the benevolence role attributed to the Turkish state by the government that as brothers in religion we had to welcome the refugees; they do not appear to be holding the government responsible. Instead, their anger targets the refugees for the problems. When we look at the most frequently used term/word at the comments, it is possible to argue that the comments are mostly coming from religious people (Annex 2). The commentators respond with a religious framing, rather than focusing on the government policies. In other words, the audience just like the video production separate the praise for the government from their resentment about the refugees. The emphasis remains on the acts of “some” refugees, not on the public policies.

The second video interviews 11 men on the Turkey’s border to Greece. The video is entitled “We asked the Syrians at the Greek border: Why are you leaving Turkey?”, however, some of the respondents appear rather to be from Asia/Central Asia rather than the Middle East. During the interviews, the journalist distributes drinks and snacks from a small plastic bag, while the respondents are talking. A recurring theme among the responses is the expression of gratitude to the Turks and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; and pointing out to the cruelty of the Greek forces at the border. We do not know whether this praise is as common among the Syrian population in general, it might be part of the video production process. However, it serves very well for the infallibility of the president and his policies. It also shows how the government expects the refugees to give open consent and gratitude. One respondent also criticizes the Syrians whom he claims to be complaining about the difficult working conditions. Interestingly, the respondents claim that they have never received any aid and they live in dire circumstances in Turkey when they are directly questioned about their well-being. The answer to the journalist’s question on why they did not fight for their country emerges as their unwillingness to hold guns against their family members who were forced to fight on behalf of the Syrian regime; and, that they would have fought against an external enemy. The word cloud generated from the transcription of the video put forth the polarization and the religious-militarist discourse. The words “Allah”, “we”, “you”, “I”, and “soldier” appear quite frequently (Annex 3). In other words, the official policy

is reproduced by the voice of the ordinary people, underlying the ideological congruence between the government and the people. The audience response that we gather from the comments has an even more so religious-militarist: “Allah”, “homeland” (vatan), “us”, “you” are highly recurring words (Annex 4).

Polarization emerges as the most dominant aspect of these two videos. Apparently, the official discourse of religious solidarity fails to convince the people, Syrian and Turkish alike. The polarization is nurtured by the feelings of injustice, grievance and alienation. The injustice, grievance and alienation in the videos do not belong to the refugees, however. In fact, the refugees are implicated as the cause of these feelings through the stealing of their voice. The voice of the refugees is stolen in two ways. In the first video, although the title claims to ask the opinion of the Syrians about the repatriation to the other provinces, only 2 out of 20 interviews are made with the Syrians. We do not know whether this is because the other Syrians refused to participate in the interview, or the journalist did not like their responses. What we know is that the account of the two Syrian respondents find the government decision righteous; and they are two able-bodied and well-clothed young men whom the other respondents could easily accuse of leaving the fight to the Turkish soldiers while they benefit from the opportunities in Turkey. In the second video, we listen to the answers given to the leading questions. The fact that almost all of them express gratitude to the Turkish people and the president alongside the poor living conditions they have in Turkey seems contradictory. It makes us wonder why they do not complain about the government policies.

The comments give us clues in this regard. The content in the two videos intend to reiterate the position that the government’s policies regarding the refugee issue was and is still correct. They also acknowledge the extant anti-refugee attitude across the society, absorb and re-direct it towards the refugees. We see that the audience to an extent responds in line. However, this means that acknowledging the negative consequences of the Syrians living in Turkey without any policy failure on behalf of the government justifies the anti-refugee attitude. It mainstreams anti-refugee attitude as a rightful act on behalf of the local population and normalizes the racist element in it. The contradictions, possibly left as contradictory in the montage, are noticed by the audience. The recurrent statement that “I would have shot any traitor even if he is my father’s son” emerges in different comments (Annex 4). Similarly, the audience appears not to be convinced by the statements that they have never received aid. Some of the comments also resent the respondents’ praise for Erdoğan, reminding us that the refugee issue remains as part of the political conflict in Turkey between the government and the opposition. Overall, the feelings of injustice and grievance based on a perception that the Syrians are treated better economically and politically than Turkish citizens, culminates into alienation: the feeling that the Turkish people became the foreigners in their own city and country deprived of income and financial aid, exposed to the Syrian culture and Arabic language.

5. Conclusion

In this report, we aimed to assess the cultural drivers of radicalisation with a focus on the mainstreaming of radicalisation through social media. Taking anti-refugee attitude as an aspect of contemporary radicalisation in Turkey, we concentrated on two videos on Syrian refugees produced by the same pro-government media organization to trace how social media mainstreams anti-refugee attitude despite high level of polarization in the media landscape.

The analysis of the two videos and their comments yields important findings. The open-door policy of the Turkish government at the beginning of the Syrian civil war forced the government to own the refugee issue around a narrative of religious solidarity and Turkey's rising role as a regional actor even after the initial social sympathy left its place to aggressive anti-refugee attitude across different sections of the society. The pro-government media organisation, as part of the pool media, forms the video content around government's rightful policy given the religious values and acknowledges the social discontent directing the resentment towards the refugees.

At the first layer, our report identified a journalist in Islamic clothing asking questions and distributing food and beverages as the generous brother in religion. However, the representation layer reveals the audience-making objective of the content producer. On the one hand, able-bodied young men who could have remained in Syria and fought the war against the regime, making incoherent explanations about why they did not and very specific praises of the Turkish president. On the other hand, Turkish respondents hurrying out from one place to another, chasing after their bread. We also see that the audience reproduces the narrative in the media objects. We observe how the religious themes resonate along with the feelings of injustice, grievance and alienation of the Turkish population. Statements of the Turkish and Syrians fuse in to justify and mainstream the anti-refugee attitude.

References and Sources

- Ahsen TV. 2019. *Suriyelilerin Gönderilmesi Hakkında Suriyeliler Ne Düşünüyor? Şok Cevaplar*. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqArh__qIZc.
- . 2020. *Yunanistan Sınırında Suriyelilere Sorduk: Türkiye'den Neden Gidiyorsunuz?* Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lggkU5m15sg>.
- Akcapar, Sebnem Koser, and Dogus Simsek. 2018. "The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion through Citizenship." *Social Inclusion* 6 (1): 176–87. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v6i1.1323>.
- Arıkan, Gökhan. 2016. "Seviyor Musun Beni? İdeolojinin Gündelikleşmesi Olarak Ahsen TV Röportajları." *Moment Dergi* 3 (1): 48–63.
- Ataman, Bora, and Barış Çoban. 2018. "Counter-Surveillance and Alternative New Media in Turkey." *Information, Communication & Society* 21 (7): 1014–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1451908>.
- Baban, Feyzi, Suzan Ilcan, and Kim Rygiel. 2017. "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Pathways to Precarity, Differential Inclusion, and Negotiated Citizenship Rights." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (1): 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1192996>.
- Balkılıç, Özgür, and Fatma Armağan Teke Lloyd. 2020. "Does Islamic Inclusion of Syrians Represent a Real Challenge to Europe's Security Approach?: Dilemmas of the AKP's Syrian Refugee Discourse." *Turkish Studies* 0 (0): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2020.1774372>.
- BBC News Türkçe. 2020. "Edirne'de Pazarkule Sınır Kapısı'nda bekleyiş: 'Artık geri dönüş yok,'" February 29, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-51687677>.
- Buğra, Ayşe. 2018. "Social Policy and Different Dimensions of Inequality in Turkey: A Historical Overview." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20 (4): 318–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2018.1385283>.
- Çelik, Gökhan, and Onur Meriç. 2019. "İstanbul'da kaydı olmayan Suriyeliler için son gün." *Hürriyet*, August 20, 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/istanbulda-kaydi-olmayan-suriyeliler-icin-son-gun-41306995>.
- Dikici Bilgin, Hasret. 2017. "What to Do with the Syrians? Party Policies towards the Syrian Refugees in Turkey." In *What to Do with the Syrians? Party Policies towards the Syrian Refugees in Turkey*. Baltimore.
- Erdoğan, Emre, and Pınar Uyan-Semerçi. 2018. "Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey." Istanbul Bilgi University Center for Migration Research. https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/06/dimensions-of-polarizationshortfindings_DNzdZml.pdf.

- Erdoğan, M. Murat. 2020. "Suriyeliler Barometresi 2019: Suriyeliler Ile Uyum İçinde Yaşamın Çerçevesi." UNHCR. www.unhcr.org › sites › 2020/09 › SB2019-TR-04092020.
- Gencil Bek, Mine. 2014. "Karşılaştırmalı Perspektiften Türkiye'de Medya Sistemi." *Mülkiye Dergisi* 34 (269): 101–25.
- Göksel, Gülay Uğur. 2018. *Integration of Immigrants and the Theory of Recognition: Just Integration*. International Political Theory. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65843-8_5.
- Gülmez, Recep. 2019. "The Securitization of the Syrian Refugee Crisis Through Political Party Discourses." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20 (3): 887–906. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0637-2>.
- Hüdayi Vakfı. 2018. *Suriyeli Kardeşlerimiz Bize Emanet*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HypA-aNTpQ>.
- Hürriyet. 2016. "Suriyelilerin 'nargileli' deniz keyfi," August 19, 2016, sec. mersin. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/suriyelilerin-nargileli-deniz-keyfi-40201160>.
- Irak, Dağhan. 2016. "A Close-Knit Bunch: Political Concentration in Turkey's Anadolu Agency through Twitter Interactions." *Turkish Studies* 17 (2): 336–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2016.1138287>.
- İstanbul Times TV Özel. 2018. *30 BİN SURİYELİ OY KULLANACAK SİZ NE DÜŞÜNÜYORSUNUZ ?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgDN26JveX8>.
- Jenzen, Olu, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Umut Korkut, and Aidan McGarry. 2021. "The Symbol of Social Media in Contemporary Protest: Twitter and the Gezi Park Movement." *Convergence* 27 (2): 414–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856520933747>.
- Karakaya Polat, Rabia. 2018. "Religious Solidarity, Historical Mission and Moral Superiority: Construction of External and Internal 'Others' in AKP's Discourses on Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *Critical Discourse Studies* 15 (5): 500–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2018.1500925>.
- Karakaya-Stump, Ayfer. 2018. "The AKP, Sectarianism, and the Alevis' Struggle for Equal Rights in Turkey." *National Identities* 20 (1): 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1244935>.
- Karakuş, Mine, and Filiz Göktuna Yaylacı. 2015. "Perceptions and Newspaper Coverage of Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *Migration Letters* 12 (3): 238–50.
- Karlıdağ, Serpil, and Selda Bulut. 2016. "Relationship between Media Ownership and News Process in Turkey from the Political Economy Perspective." *Journal of Media Critiques* 2 (7): 11–33.
- Kaya, Ayhan. 2015. "Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity." *South European Society and Politics* 20 (1): 47–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2014.979031>.

- . 2020. "Migration as a Leverage Tool in International Relations: Turkey as a Case Study." *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 17 (68): 21–39.
<https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.856870>.
- Kaya, Raşit, and Barış Çakmur. 2010. "Politics and the Mass Media in Turkey." *Turkish Studies* 11 (4): 521–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2010.540112>.
- Kaya, Zeynep N., and Matthew Whiting. 2019. "The HDP, the AKP and the Battle for Turkish Democracy." *Ethnopolitics* 18 (1): 92–106.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2018.1525168>.
- Kayhan Pusane, Özlem. 2014. "Turkey's Kurdish Opening: Long Awaited Achievements and Failed Expectations." *Turkish Studies* 15 (1): 81–99.
- Kirişçi, Kemal. 2000. "Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices." *Middle Eastern Studies* 36 (3): 1–22.
- Korkut, Umut. 2016. "Pragmatism, Moral Responsibility or Policy Change: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Selective Humanitarianism in the Turkish Refugee Regime." *Comparative Migration Studies* 4 (1): 2.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-015-0020-9>.
- Kurt, Ümit. 2010. "The Doctrine of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' as Official Ideology of the September 12 and the 'Intellectuals' Hearth–Aydınlar Ocağı' as the Ideological Apparatus of the State." *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 3 (2): 113–28.
- Madenöglü, Dila Naz. 2016. "Bir Propaganda Aracı Olarak İnternet Yayıncılığı: Ahsen TV Örneği." *Intermedia International E-Journal* 3 (4): 127–43.
- Akser, Murat. 2018. "News Media Consolidation and Censorship in Turkey: From Liberal Ideals to Corporatist Realities." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 29 (3): 78–97.
- Narlı, Nilüfer, Mine Özaşçılar, and Işıl Zeynep Turkan İpek. 2020. "Turkish Daily Press Framing and Representation of Syrian Women Refugees and Gender-Based Problems: Implications for Social Integration." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 18 (1): 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2018.1557311>.
- Ozduzen, Ozge. 2020. "'We Are Not Arabs and Taksim Is Ours.'" *City* 24 (5–6): 741–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2020.1833538>.
- Ozduzen, Ozge, Umut Korkut, and Cansu Ozduzen. 2020. "'Refugees Are Not Welcome': Digital Racism, Online Place-Making and the Evolving Categorization of Syrians in Turkey." *New Media & Society*, September, 1461444820956341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820956341>.
- Saka, Erkan. 2018. "Social Media in Turkey as a Space for Political Battles: AKTrolls and Other Politically Motivated Trolling." *Middle East Critique* 27 (2): 161–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2018.1439271>.

- Saraçođlu, Cenk, and Daniele Belanger. 2019. "Syrian Refugees and Turkey: Whose 'Crisis'?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises*, edited by Dr Cecilia Menjivar, Dr Marie Ruiz, and Dr Immanuel Ness, 279–96. Oxford University Press.
- Saraçođlu, Cenk, and Özhan Demirkol. 2015. "Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42 (3): 301–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.947152>.
- Şen, Mustafa. 2010. "Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the Rise of the Justice and Development Party." *Turkish Studies* 11 (1): 59–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683841003747047>.
- Şenol Sert, Deniz, and Didem Daniş. 2021. "Framing Syrians in Turkey: State Control and No Crisis Discourse." *International Migration* 59 (1): 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12753>.
- Sunata, Ulaş, and Esra Yıldız. 2018. "Representation of Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Media." *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies* 7 (1): 129–51. https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms.7.1.129_1.
- T24. 2015. "Suriyeli Mültecilere Sağlık Hizmetleri Bedava," October 9, 2015. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/suriyeli-multecilere-saglik-hizmetleri-bedava,312345>.
- T.C. Millî Savunma Bakanlığı. 2020. *Suriyeli Kardeşlerimiz Türkiye ve Mehmetçik'e Teşekkür Etti*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD83LyF9zv4>.
- TRT Avaz. 2016. *Gaziantep'te Suriyeli Kardeşlerimiz İçin Yapılan Yetimevi İnşaatı - Dünyadaki Türkiye - TRT Avaz*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkju6tvnZ4A>.
- Twitube TV. 2018. *Nargile Keyfi Yapan Kahraman Suriyeliler - Uzun Versiyon*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbJaOGYR1H8>.
- Yeşil, Bilge. 2018. "Authoritarian Turn or Continuity? Governance of Media through Capture and Discipline in the AKP Era." *South European Society and Politics* 23 (2): 239–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2018.1487137>.
- Yesilada, Birol, and Barry Rubin. 2013. *Islamization of Turkey under the AKP Rule*. Routledge.