

Regional Political Attitudes in Turkey:

A Media-Based Comparison Between Eastern, Western,
and Central Anatolian Regions

Oscar Andersson

Handledare: Khalid Khayati

Examinator: Per Jansson

Abstract

Turkey's political landscape is characterized by pronounced regional differences, commonly described through a division between western coastal provinces, the central Anatolian heartland, and the Kurdish-dominated southeast. While these regional patterns are well documented in electoral statistics and survey research, less attention has been paid to how regional political cultures are reflected in everyday political news coverage.

This thesis addresses this gap by examining how politics is described in regional news media from eastern, western, and central Anatolia. Rather than focusing on voting behavior, the study analyses political news articles as media narratives that shape how citizens encounter politics in daily life. The empirical material consists of forty-seven articles from regional newspapers published during the 2023 parliamentary and presidential elections, the 2024 local elections, and the post-electoral period.

Methodologically, the study applies a qualitative comparative content analysis guided by Robert M. Entman's framing theory. By integrating the "Three-Way Partition" concept mentioned in Akarca & Baslevant's 2010 and 2011 studies with Entman's framing theory, which focuses on differences in focus, tone, and values, the thesis contributes to research on the perception and delivery of political events by different outlets in the context of regional variation. The findings indicate systematic regional variation in how political actors, conflicts, and the role of the state are framed, reflecting broader differences in regional political culture.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

Turkey is a country with stark political regional differences. Previous research has shown three major regional blocs (see Chapter 4) that structure Turkish electoral politics: Western coastal provinces, the central Anatolian heartland, and the Kurdish-dominated southeast differ fundamentally in party support, ideological orientation, identity politics, and expectations from the state (Akarca & Başlevent, 2011; Bekaroğlu & Osmanbaşoğlu, 2021).

It is important to note that politics is not a two-dimensional concept that citizens encounter only in elections. They also meet politics daily through news media that decide which news to cover, or which voices to quote, and what kind of language to use. It is reasonable to ask if news media in different parts of the country also talk about politics in fundamentally different ways, especially in a country where the regional political attitudes adopt strong dynamics and differences.

This thesis comes from that question. Instead of focusing on how people vote, it examines how politics is described in news articles from three regional contexts: eastern, central Anatolian, and western Turkey. Methodologically, the study is based on a qualitative comparative framing content analysis of news articles from regional newspapers, focusing on coverage related to the 2023 parliamentary and presidential elections, the 2024 local election, and the post election period going into 2025, since the “Three Turkeys” model has been particularly evident in recent elections.

1.2 Problem formulation

Provinces tend to group into relatively stable areas according to research on regional voting trends; these patterns are connected to variables like income, education, urbanization, socio-economic class, and the habitus. The majority of this information is based on survey research

and electoral statistics. As suggested by Akarca & Başlevent's research, the regional vote shares change over time and how they connect to demographic and socioeconomic factors, which can lead to a general categorization of '3-way partitions' (2010, p.2)

These contributions, on the other hand, fail to grasp how political events are covered in everyday life and how regional political cultures may be reflected in journalistic practices. While there is an international literature detangling the symbiotic relationship between media and political power holders (Entman, 1993; Panayirci et. al., 2016), there are still few works that explicitly take regional political culture in Turkey as a starting point and then ask how it is reflected in news coverage from different parts of the country. Research on Turkish media often focuses on national outlets such as *Milliyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Sözcü*, *Posta*, *Sabah*, focusing on political crises or on the relationship between media and government (Yeşil, 2016; Aşık, 2021), rather than on systematic regional comparison, having been achieved using local news sources.

This thesis addresses that gap by shifting the focus from electoral outcomes and survey answers to media narratives about politics. The idea is that regional political cultures may be visible not only in how people vote, but also in how news media describe the state, the government, the opposition, Kurdish actors, and central political issues. By comparing articles from different regional media outlets during a period with intense political activity, the study explores whether there are systematic differences in what is emphasised, which actors are foregrounded, and what kind of tone and values are attached to political events.

1.3 Aim and research question

The purpose of this bachelor's thesis will be to identify how the political context at a regional level in Turkey has been represented through political journalism using comparisons of political reporting in media located in eastern, western, and central Anatolia. More specifically, this study examines how Turkish political issues (elections, government activities, trustee appointments,

internal party conflict, and the Kurdish issue) have been framed within the Turkish national media during the period of the 2023-2025 elections and post-election.

Regional differences in political culture are well established in voting behavior, but it remains unclear whether these differences also shape how politics is narrated and interpreted in everyday news media. The persistence of regional political divisions in Turkey suggests that the way citizens in one region perceive national political issues can be very different than those in another area; in turn, this can create distinct ‘environments’ of information that contribute to increasing political polarization among citizens (Akarca & Başlevent, 2010, 2011). Identifying these differences is necessary for understanding how democratic deliberation occurs (or fails to occur) in the regional political environment. Additionally, regional political cultures in Eastern Turkey are influenced by both ethnic identity and center-periphery dynamics; therefore, the Kurdish issue has a significant contextual influence on the media’s framing of national news in Eastern Turkey, which will be discussed in this study.

During the 2023-2025 timeline, there were several major political events (financial crisis, disputed elections, and state intervention in local democracy) that accentuated regional political differences and produced an enormous amount of media attention throughout all regions.

To achieve its goals, this bachelor’s degree will answer the following research questions:

How does political news coverage differ between eastern, western, and central Anatolian Turkey in terms of tone, values, and focus?

Sub-questions:

Which political actors, issues, and events are given priority coverage in each region’s media?

What evaluation of key political actors (the government, the opposition, Kurdish political parties), is provided by the media in each of the three regions?

In which normative value (democracy, national unity, rights as a culture, etc.) are justifications made or critiques leveled against governmental or opposition political action in each region?

Why are these differences in framing the news at the regional levels, and how do they relate to the broader political cultures of the respective regions?

1.4 Scientific and societal relevance

The media literature, both in Turkey and internationally, shows that news coverage shapes how citizens understand politics by highlighting some issues and interpretations rather than others. By bringing these strands together in a qualitative comparative framing of news articles, the thesis adds an empirical example of how regional political contexts can be studied through media texts. Understanding similarities and differences in media narratives across Turkey's three main political regions can provide a more nuanced picture of the conditions for informed public debate and for mutual understanding between regions.

1.5 Delimitations

This is a bachelor's degree thesis, which means that the scope of the study must be limited. Several delimitations are therefore inevitable.

The analysis focuses on newspapers in relation to their political news coverage from three broad regional contexts that are treated as ideal-typical: eastern, central Anatolian, and western Turkey. This choice is informed by previous research that identifies several regional blocs and models of regional division, but it is intentionally simplified in order to keep the comparison manageable within the available time and word limit. Due to the same reasons, the empirical material consists of forty-seven news articles, while the focus is on straight news reporting about politics. Third, the time frame is restricted to a recent period around the electoral cycle of

2023-2024 and post-elections. This period is chosen because political news was particularly intense and because regional patterns and conflicts were openly discussed in public debate. The thesis does not follow media coverage over a longer historical period. Finally, the thesis focuses on media content, not on audience reactions or effects. The ambition is more modest: to describe and interpret how politics is represented in selected media from different regions and to relate these representations to existing knowledge about regional political culture in Turkey.

Chapter 2 – Historical & Ideological Foundations

2.1 Historical Origins & Party System

The early Turkish Republic institutionalized “Kemalism” (republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, statism, reformism) through sweeping legal, educational, and cultural reforms (Zürcher, 2004; Kinross, 1965; Lewis, 2002). Kemalist nationalism promoted a civic and unitary conception of citizenship, rejecting all ethnic or religious autonomies and reinforcing a highly centralized state apparatus (Zürcher, 2004). Kemalist secularism as a part of the, “Fabian strategy, resorted to different policies based on which were needed and feasible at any given time” (Heper, 2013, p.143), subordinated religious institutions to state oversight through the Diyanet, a state institution for Religious Affairs (Heper, 2013); while populism and statism limited early pluralism and justified strong top down modernizations (Mango, 1999). As Yavuz (2019) states, “Islam was not only a religion but, more importantly, the broad signifier for the ‘old order’... that impeded the social and economic progress for Turkey to be an effective member in the modern global community of nations” (p.2). This understanding of Islam, which was tied to the Ottoman past, reinforced the conviction of the Kemalist that modernization required internalizing Western institutions and norms, which came to shape the ideological boundaries of subsequent political movements.

The introduction of multi-party politics in the 1950s brought conservative rural voters into national politics and enabled the start of lasting ideological alternatives. The 1980 military ‘intervention’ dissolved the existing political organizations, reshaped the constitutional and electoral framework, and brought forward a more restrictive political environment. Although the state did not officially endorse any single ideological doctrine, the educational and cultural policies of the period did help form some of the conditions that facilitated the resurgence of both religious conservatism and Turkish nationalism (Yavuz, 2009).

The new 10% national electoral threshold that had been introduced, officially designed to hinder fragmentation, disproportionately and unfairly disadvantaged leftist and pro-Kurdish parties, while at the same time reinforcing consolidation among larger right-wing blocs (Özbudun, 2012). Hence, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, several voter identities have been formed.

Party	Core Base	Underlying Cleavage
CHP	Secular, urban, coastal west	Kemalist republicanism & modernization centers
AKP	Conservative Anatolia, urban migrants, lower-middle classes	Religious identity & post-1980 conservative opening
MHP	Nationalist-conservative, security-oriented voters	Ethno-national identity & unitary state emphasis
DEM	Kurdish-majority southeast & pro-minority electorate	Ethnic identity & cultural recognition demands

2.2. The 2023–2024 Elections and Regional Voting

Turkey held its parliamentary and presidential elections in May 2023; these elections were arguably one of the most important in Turkish history. The elections took place during a very difficult time for the country, with economic crisis, inflation at over 127% (ENAG, 2023), and only 3 months after devastating earthquakes that killed over 50,000 people in Turkey, the elections were

viewed as a test of Turkish democracy, and the first real electoral challenge to Erdoğan's position since he became president.

In addition to the troublesome economic situation caused by inflation, President Erdoğan faced criticism over his response to the earthquakes. The death toll was very high, the scale of the destruction was too, and the legitimacy of his leadership had been tested. In order to defend his position, he widened his electoral coalition. It can be argued that the parties included in this coalition framed their campaign around an 'Islamist-Nationalist Populist Frame' that portrayed them as the 'true democrats' (Özpek & Yaşar, 2017). In framing themselves as '*yerli ve milli*' (Eng: native and national), the People's Alliance positioned itself as the defenders of the nation against the 'enemies' of the people (both internal and external) that were threatening national values and identity. To widen the appeal of this alliance, Erdoğan incorporated fringe Islamist parties into the alliance, such as the YRP (New Welfare Party) and the Islamist pro-Kurdish HÜDA-PAR (Free Cause Party) on the far-right, as well as marginalised parties on the center-left, hence creating a large and diverse coalition of conservative and nationalist voters.

In the second-round election of the presidential election, Erdoğan was elected to office again with 52.18 percent of the vote, while the AKP-led People's Alliance maintained its majority in the parliament. The results of this election highlighted the big regional divisions inside Turkey. Also, while President Erdoğan won the election in a landslide victory in central Anatolia (68.94% in Konya) and some parts of the Black Sea, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu won the election in the western coastal regions of Turkey. The DEM party (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party), running under the YSP (Green Left Party) label due to legal restrictions, won 62 seats in the parliament, all of which were based in the southeastern provinces of Turkey.

March 31, 2024, Turkey held its local elections, which produced a significant change in the politics of the country. Notably, the CHP won large metropolitan municipalities, including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya, and Adana, and by doing so, it resulted in the worst electoral performance of the AKP in almost two decades. The DEM Party regained control of many municipalities in the

southeast of Turkey, winning mayoral races in cities such as Diyarbakir, Van, Mardin, and many other Kurdish-majority cities. However, the government responded to the Democratic Party's successes by appointing *kayyim* (Eng: trustee) to several DEM-run municipalities, citing terrorism investigations, and therefore, effectively nullified the electoral outcome in those areas.

Regional vote patterns are relevant to this research due to their indication of long-term regional political cultures; it is possible that these will also shape the framing and interpretation of political events by regional news media.

2.3 Turkish Media Landscape

Since the media ownership was restructured in the early 2010s, the majority of the most well-known and influential national newspapers and TV stations are owned by large media conglomerations that have either direct or indirect connections to the AKP government or rely on contracts with the government. This “new media system” that Turkey currently has is a captured and restructured superstructure by the governing AKP (Akser, 2023, p.99). In the meantime, opposition and independent media face many obstacles, such as lawsuits, tax investigations, advertising boycotts, and even closure.

Chapter 3 – Previous Research

3.1 Regional voting patterns and electoral cleavages in Turkey

Turkish electoral politics show geographically stable voting patterns. Akarca and Başlevent (2010) suggest that “3-way and 5-way partitions of the country adequately capture the main political cleavages in Turkey” (p. 1). They regionalize the country into three to five blocs: right-wing conservatives dominate much of Turkey, left-wing and nationalist parties are strong in the west, and Kurdish nationalist parties dominate the southeast. Long-term social and economic conditions, rather than short-term election cycles, explain these patterns.

Bekaroğlu and Osmanbaşıoğlu (2020) reinforce this by showing that historical, cultural, and ethnic factors shape regional political identities, which persist also among internal migrants. Regional political cultures are thus layered, encompassing economic conditions, religion, ethnicity, and local histories, focusing on the “increasing geographical consistency” (p.4) of voting trends for political parties from 1950 to 2020. The book identifies and discusses multiple cleavages that also overlap ideologically and culturally, i.e., “secular-religious, Turk-Kurd, Sunni-Alavi” (Bekaroğlu & Osmanbaşıoğlu, 2020, p.4). Even though there is considerable variation in the type of issues that are presented and the parties that are involved, the geographic pattern of political activity is relatively consistent over time and indicates that citizens develop a sense of identity and history regarding their place of residence, which influences their perception of political parties and policy. Research has demonstrated that geography should not solely be viewed as the physical boundaries of land: Electoral geography examines voting behavior in relation to “locale” and “sense of place,” (Bekaroğlu & Osmanbaşıoğlu, 2020, p.3) demonstrating that daily social environments, neighborhood conversations, local class structures, and many other components of a citizen's social environment impact their perceptions of politics.

3.2 Kurdish identity, state relations, and regional political culture

Another relevant literature for this paper is on Kurdish attitudes towards separation and the Turkish state. The Kurdish question is included in the research because it is part of the political culture in the East and Southeast of Turkey, rather than being an independent area of study. In order to provide for comparison between regional media coverage of national political events, it will be essential to understand how the historical experience of the center-periphery conflict and the exercise of state authority have contributed to the frames that journalists and audience members use when interpreting information in different regions.

The most important reference in this regard is Sarigil & Karakoc's paper "Who Supports Secession? The Determinants of Secessionist Attitudes among Turkey's Kurds" (2016). The authors use two national surveys conducted in 2011 and 2013 to identify what factors caused Kurdish respondents to prefer either regional autonomy or full independence. The authors determine support through direct survey questions, whether Kurdish respondents believe Kurds should have an autonomous administrative unit within Turkey, and/or if Kurds should create an independent state. The respondents who support these options were listed as supporting autonomy or separation. The statistics interestingly contradict the state's assertion that ordinary Kurds generally reject separatism and that the PKK does not enjoy a greater level of public support. While in the 2011 survey, 55% of Kurdish respondents supported autonomy and 23% supported separation, in the 2013 survey, the numbers increased to 66% for autonomy and 32% for separation (Sarigil & Karakoc, 2016, p.3). However, despite the fact that there are more calls for regional autonomy, roughly one-third of respondents expressed support for independence, indicating a large reservoir of separatist sentiment. Sarigil and Karakoc explain these attitudes using grievance theory, particularly the concept of "relative deprivation" (2016, p.4). The primary factors are that individuals who feel they have been treated unfairly by the state are more likely to favor solutions such as autonomy or separation. According to the authors' statistical models, perceived discrimination is the most consistent

predictor: Kurdish respondents who feel the state discriminates against Kurds exhibit significantly higher levels of support for both autonomy and separation than respondents who do not perceive the state as discriminating.

Also, the authors show that perceptions of discrimination are rather widespread. In the 2023 survey conducted by Diyarbakir-based *Kurdish Barometer*, more than half of Kurdish respondents felt that the Turkish state discriminates against Kurds, and approximately 60% believed Kurds are not considered equal to Turks when it comes to rights, freedoms, and socio-economic status (p. 27). Historically, scholars of the Kurdish issue have also argued that Kurdish ethnonationalism was born out of the state's refusal to acknowledge and suppress Kurdish identity and political aspirations (Entessar, 1992 p. 324-325; Jwaideh, 2006 p. 133-145). Together, this evidence supports the idea that political grievances related to the central state contribute to the existence of separatist attitudes.

Sarıgil and Karakoc's (2016) findings illuminate that the Kurdish attitudes to the Turkish state are primarily influenced by the experience and perception of discrimination rather than socioeconomic conditions. Secondly, they indicate that the way elites communicate politically and frame issues (i.e., by Kurdish parties or the state) can change preferences between autonomy and separation over time.

3.3 Media, framing, and political communication

Political communication research often treats various media organisations as political actors in their own right, rather than neutral observers; they select, organise, and colour information in ways that shape how people understand political events and evaluate political actors, hence news outlets have a power to decide which actors, issues, and conflicts become visible to the public, and also how they are presented.

A central concept related to this is 'framing'. In Entman's (1993) words, the frames "diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe" (p.52). They serve as a pattern that highlights some aspects and makes them more prominent, in order to promote a particular definition of the problem, an idea of

what is responsible, and expectations about what should be done. Frames are recurring storylines that link events to broader ideas about, such as for example corruption, national unity, security, or human rights. When different media outlets apply different sets of frames to the same event, audiences can end up with very different ideas of what has happened and who is to blame (if anyone). The framing theory demonstrates that “AKP’s government-friendly media do not ask questions but relay the government’s statements as truth, effectively trying to form favorable public opinion” (Akser, 2023, p.100) by utilizing a generic frame. Issue-specific frames center on specific controversies and represent the ways that journalists organize and interpret these events. Frames are structured based on the structure of the media system.

The work of Yeşil (2016) shows how the press was utilized as a mechanism of nation-building by promoting an image of the (Turkish) nation, while at the same time marginalizing other voices that were seen as a threat to the state (e.g., Kurdish and Islamist movements). Deregulation and commercialization during the 1980s and 1990s brought the introduction of private ownership and new media outlets, but because of their reliance on state licenses, public contracts, and financing, large media conglomerates continued to be dependent upon the political elite. According to Yeşil (2016, p.88-126), under the AKP, the government’s control over the media increased due to the increasing amount of government influence over media through changes in ownership, legal pressure, and selective use of advertising and tax investigations, resulting in a climate in which pro-government and critical media outlets produced very distinct accounts of political realities. Panayırıcı et al. (2016, p. 551–567) provide a specific example of how this occurs in practice by researching the coverage of the corruption probe on 17 December 2013 in three national dailies affiliated with different camps: the pro-government daily *Sabah*, the Kemalist opposition paper *Sözcü*, and the Gülen-affiliated *Zaman*. Through a qualitative content analysis, they identified a number of issue-specific frames related to the probe, including ‘corruption,’ ‘smear campaign,’ ‘sinister forces,’ and ‘cleavages in the social-political camp.’ Pro-government media described the probe as an unjust attack on the government by unknown domestic and international foes, whereas

opposition media emphasized corruption and abuse of authority; the same event was interpreted by both sides in opposite ways. The authors contend that this was not simply classic press-party parallelism or patronage, but a result of a larger convergence between media outlets and the sociopolitical camps within the framework of a polarized system.

Aşık's (2021) study offers a further perspective by looking at how journalists conceptualize politics and the Kurdish issue. Based on interviews and observations conducted in two national television channels, one aligned with the government and the other more oppositional, Aşık demonstrated how the journalists' political views and their perception of the larger context influenced the notion of "balanced" or "responsible" journalism. Historically, mainstream news about the Kurdish conflict was primarily based on state sources and portrayed the southeast almost exclusively through the lens of terrorism and security. When the peace process began, some outlets experimented with more inclusive language, but Aşık showed that long-held norms and concerns regarding national unity continue to guide editorial decisions in newsrooms today. The Kurdish "other" is not only a subject of discussion but also a boundary that restricts what can be said, and how in newsrooms.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Framework

4.1 Political culture

The idea that the world is made up of distinctive cultural regions (civilizations), with corresponding views about government and democracy, has been an influential idea. Huntington (1996) first identified these civilizations. Quantitative studies of political culture at the national level also follow from this idea. Almond and Verba (1989) and Inglehart (1997) were among the earliest to do so, looking at how widespread values toward democracy and civic life are in each country. Later evidence showed that while there may be a common set of views toward politics within a nation, cultural differences could be found within a country as well. Examples include differences by region, community, ethnicity (Desmet et al., 1987; Silver & Dowley, 2000).

While early literature often treated political culture as a uniform national property, this view fails to account for internal diversity. As Blaydes & Grimmer (2019, p.2) mention, “each (individual) belongs to a single political subculture... a profile of similar expressed values,” and continue, “...these subcultures are shared across countries, and each country can be represented by a mixture of the various global subcultures”. Hence, the research on Turkey that was reviewed points to persistent regional differences in party support, views of the state, and basic political values. There is no single, uniform ‘Turkish’ political culture that can explain everything. Therefore, political culture will be viewed in terms of its regional and local context. The underlying premise of the thesis is that people in different areas of Turkey have, with time, developed different perspectives and interpretations on politics, shaped by the history and daily experience of their region. Coastal towns in western Turkey, with a history of trade tourism and a secular middle class, do not think about politics the same way that towns in southeastern Turkey, which have experienced conflict, martial law, disenfranchisement, and displacement of Kurds, do. The fact that people in a region may not all think alike does not prohibit the idea that people in a region will develop and use certain interpretations and certain value systems that are not as present elsewhere.

This thesis uses the concept of political culture as a connection between regional contexts and media content. If individuals in different parts of the country perceive the state, opposition parties, and the Kurdish issue in different ways, then it would be reasonable to assume that regional media outlets would either reflect or reinforce those perceptions in their reporting of national politics.

4.2 Models of regional division in Turkey

Turkey's voting behavior and political beliefs (as measured by electoral geography and public opinion) have long been grouped into clusters based on ideological beliefs. While there are exceptions to this pattern, such as strong support for Kurdish autonomy in Southeastern Anatolia and differences in levels of institutional trust, these variations exist even when demographic factors have been accounted for, indicating that geographic location continues to play an important role in determining voting behavior and political beliefs.

While the terms 'east', 'west', and 'central' may serve as useful analytical tools to compare news coverage of the same issue, they should not be treated as fixed ethnic categories. The contrast between the two ideal-type environments, one in which the state is perceived as a stable presence and the other in which the state is perceived as illegitimate and coercive, serves to provide a comparative lens for assessing news reporting about the same issues, but does not establish formal boundaries or jurisdictions.

4.2.1 The "Three Turkeys" Model

The most established regional division model in Turkish political research is the "Three Turkeys" framework, which identifies:

1. Western Turkey (Secular-Republican): The coastal provinces that contain large cities (such as İzmir, Antalya, and Muğla). Assuming Akarca & Baslevant's (2011) mapping, this area falls under Cluster 1, which includes cities that are the "most urbanized, most densely populated, richest, most educated, and most modern" (p.11) in Turkey. This region has

historically been the hearth of secular, democratic, and economically developed areas as a result of containing coastal cultural/social harmony. Topics regarding democracy, rule of law, European Union membership, individual freedoms, minority and human rights have dominated the political agenda within these areas. People from this area tend to view their own identity or values as being true to the original spirit of the Republican tradition of Kemalism.

2. Central Anatolia (Conservative-Religious): The central provinces of Turkey (which include Konya, Kayseri, and Sivas) are identified by an economically entrepreneurial, religiously conservative, and Islamist population, while adopting an aggressive nationalistic ideology. The demonstration of the level of support for conservatism and the degree to which people from this area identify with the AKP can be seen through the election results. The area is included in Cluster 2 in the research by Akarca & Baslevent (2011), and “lies somewhere in between, but is closer to the third cluster than the first” (p.11) in terms of urbanization and industrialization levels.

3. Eastern Turkey (Kurdish Identity Politics): The eastern and southeastern provinces of Turkey (which include Van, Diyarbakir, and Mardin) have the largest concentrations of Kurds in the country, Kurdish population making up at least the 40% of the cities included (Akarca & Baslevent, 2011 p.11): Therefore, the region has a distinct political preference from the rest of Turkey. These regions have shown support to pro-Kurdish political parties (such as the DEM party) throughout the years, and have experienced violence. The demands for cultural and legal recognition are, therefore, typical of the regional political culture.

4.3 Framing Theory

Framing theory by Entman is the basis for the qualitative content analysis used in this thesis. As Entman states, framing refers to “framing refers to selection and salience of parts of one frame to construct a public version of events or speech” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). This thesis uses Entman’s

Frame Theory as a theoretical lens to examine how texts are interpreted/decoded, specifically how news texts are analyzed. This examination focuses on how problems are identified, who is shown to be responsible/legitimate, and how political actions are ethically judged. Entman's Frame Theory is particularly useful when examining political news because it examines the relationship between media discourse, power, and political legitimacy.

Unlike some other qualitative analyses where a list of frames is applied before data collection begins, this thesis employs an inductive approach in the analysis of the data. Frames were allowed to arise from the material during the close reading process. This was an example of Bryman's recommendations for the use of flexibility and reflexivity in qualitative research.

4.4 Analytical concepts and their use in the thesis

The last section of the conceptual framework describes how the concepts will be utilized in practice. The research question asks:

“How does the political local news coverage of eastern, western, and central Turkey differ in terms of the tone, values, and focus of reporting?”

This connects the three theoretical approaches of political culture, regional identity, and framing. Political culture and regional identity set the stage, suggesting that individuals in different areas of Turkey have differing perspectives on how to engage with politics. Individuals' experiences with the state, political parties, and conflict vary depending on where they live in Turkey. These varying perspectives are embedded in the history of the area, the daily lives of residents, and the public debates that occur in those regions. News media function within these regional contexts and can reflect or influence them. Framing theory provides a method to analyze how this may manifest in media texts. In the context of this thesis, frames are viewed in a fairly straightforward and empirical manner; i.e., as ways of storytelling about political events which emphasize elements of the event, identify responsibility for the event, and indicate what is at stake. Frames are not viewed

as fixed categories that can only be identified through mechanical coding processes. Rather, frames serve as guides for the types of questions that researchers ask of their data.

Three aspects are central for the analysis:

Focus: Which aspects of the issue(s) and actors are highlighted/foregrounded? For example, do the articles highlight, among others, economic hardships, security threats, un/democratic practices, corruption, national unity, minority rights, or something else? What political actors are highlighted, and how much coverage are they provided with?

Tone: How do the articles evaluate the key actors involved? Is the government presented as being legitimate, competent, and protective, or as being distant, corrupt, and coercive? Is the opposition described as being accountable, or as divisive? Does the article portray actors from any particular ethnic background as political partners, or instead reduce them to security issues, or ignore them altogether?

Values: Which explicit or implicit normative/ethical standards/frameworks/principles are referenced/invoked when describing events? E.g., do articles invoke democracy, human rights, national unity, security, or other values? Which values are employed by the media outlets to either criticize or support specific actors?

The theoretical chapter is linked to the empirical chapter by transforming the theoretical notions into concrete research questions that will guide the comparison of Eastern, Western, and Central Anatolian media outlets. The research questions were formulated while conducting a content analysis of articles published during the 2023-2024 election period and the post-election period. The analysis, therefore, asked:

What is the main problem that the article presents as most important?

Whose voice is given priority?

How is the position of the State presented in the article?

Is the use of threat and security dominant in the article, or do representations of right and representation dominate?

Are references to regional identity included anywhere in the article?

Subsequently, differences and similarities in the use of focus, tone, and values in the Eastern, Central, and Western media outlets will be evaluated using the political cultures.

Chapter 5 – Methodology and Materials

5.1 Qualitative Comparative Media Research Design

This bachelor's thesis utilizes a qualitative comparative methodology to compare how the reporting of political news varies among eastern, western, and central Anatolia in Turkey. Specifically, the study examines how political events, political actors, and political conflict are framed within regional newspapers, specifically focusing upon the tone, values, and thematic focus of the framing. It is not the intent of this study to measure the effect of media or audience response to media; instead, the study will analyze how political realities are created through news discourse in various regional contexts.

A qualitative research design is utilized as the research question relates to the interpretation of the context and meaning of the phenomena under investigation, rather than measurable variables. Bryman defines the qualitative research design simply as “understanding the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Therefore, the political news articles are examined as interpretative texts that reflect larger political cultures and power structures within each of the regional contexts.

The study is comparative in nature as it compares the reporting of the same political events and/or political figures in the same time frame across three distinct geographic areas, utilizing the same analytical lens. A comparative qualitative research design is used to allow researchers to examine both similarities and differences in media coverage across multiple contexts. In this thesis, the three geographic regions are utilized as the “cases,” allowing the researcher to examine how the regional political cultures influence the framing of political news. Using a comparative qualitative research design provides the opportunity for cross-geographic comparisons while providing the researcher sufficient analytical depth to complete the analysis. The comparative qualitative research design is better than a single case study as it allows for cross-case analysis and the identification of

patterns across geographic regions. Therefore, the comparative qualitative research design is best suited to answer the “how” and “in what ways” political news framing differs geographically.

5.2 Sample and Data Collection

The sample was collected using a “purposive sampling” strategy. (Bryman, 2012, pp. 418 – 420). The purpose of the sampling strategy was to select media outlets and articles that were relevant to the research questions asked in the bachelor’s thesis rather than representative samples of the population.

The primary source of data for the study is secondary data, specifically newspaper articles that serve as the primary data for the study. Newspaper articles were selected based on their location, political significance, and availability. The articles analyzed include national political events, elections, government action, and state-opposition relationships during the 2023 – 2025 time period. Secondary data sources, including academic literature regarding Turkish politics, media systems, and political culture, were also used to provide a contextual background to the results of the study. Documents issued by governmental and intergovernmental agencies were also consulted as necessary to verify the accuracy of the news coverage related to the specific events or processes mentioned in the news articles.

Material for the study was identified using several search engines, including UniSearch (via Linköping University Library) and Google Scholar, and conducting targeted online searches. Keywords searched included combinations of “Turkey,” “local media,” “elections,” “political news,” and regional-specific keywords such as “kayyim,” “milli görüş,” “hizmet,” and “milli irade.”

5.2.1 Newspaper and Article Selection Criteria

The selection of newspapers and articles was based on the theoretical relevance of the material rather than the representativeness of the sample. In qualitative research, sampling is

primarily focused on collecting information that is most useful for answering the research questions. According to Bryman, purposive sampling is about selecting cases “because they are relevant to the research questions that are being posed” (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Therefore, the goal of the sampling is not to make generalizable statements to the population; however, the goal is to collect rich and informative material that highlights the phenomenon of interest.

Regional newspapers were selected based on three criteria. First, regional embeddedness was viewed as a critical criterion. The media outlets included in the study had a clear geographic orientation and were directed towards populations residing in eastern, western, or central Anatolia. Bryman noted that documents should be understood in light of the “contexts in which they are produced and used” (2012, p. 554). By focusing on media outlets that are embedded in the same geographic area as the study’s other data collection, it is possible to examine how political news is framed within the same local political and cultural environment. Secondly, newspapers were selected based on their consistent reporting of national political events. Those newspapers that regularly reported on elections, government actions, opposition politics, and state-society relations were selected first, as these topics were the primary focus of the study. Bryman emphasized that documents should be selected because they have “relevance to the issues that are being studied” (2012, p. 553). Third, the political orientation and editorial position of each publication were considered. Although this study does not categorize newspapers by their ideology and therefore does not rigidly position them, each has an ideological tendency associated with its respective geographic area. The consideration of these regional tendencies will provide an additional layer of nuance when comparing how political power, legitimacy, and conflict are portrayed across different regional media outlets, while also acknowledging that no single publication represents all of a region’s views.

Selections of specific articles for analysis followed the same purposeful methodology. Articles were selected based on their address of politically significant national events, i.e., elections, governmental policy announcements, political disputes, etc. Opinion pieces were secondary to

straight news reporting, as the intent of the study was to explore how journalists construct political realities, rather than provide explicit normative commentary. As Bryman states, “how events are represented rather than whether they are reported accurately” (Bryman, 2012, p. 555).

In terms of the number of articles selected for analysis from each of the selected geographic areas, it was determined that selecting relatively equal numbers of articles would facilitate comparative analysis while also permitting sufficient freedom to include article selections of particular importance to the study. Therefore, this approach achieved both the goal of ensuring consistency of the analytical process while also attaining the qualitative research objectives of developing a deep and contextually rich body of data.

5.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data collected for this research. Qualitative content analysis is well-suited to identify patterns of meaning, recurring themes, and underlying presumptions in text-based materials. In contrast to quantitative methods, qualitative content analysis emphasizes interpretation and contextual understanding of the data, and not simply quantifying the frequency of certain words, etc.

In qualitative document analysis, as Bryman states, newspaper articles should be granted the status of socially located texts that “should be read in terms of the meanings they convey and the contexts in which they are produced” (Bryman, 2012, p. 560). This involved multiple readings of the selected materials and identification of specific portions of those materials that corresponded to the research questions posed in the study.

The analysis of the data is organized around three primary analytic dimensions:

Dimensions of Focus - What political actors, events, and issues are highlighted and/or obscured in the coverage;

Dimension of Tone - How political actors and developments are characterized and evaluated;
and

Dimension of Values - Which values are articulated to justify or critique political actions.

Each dimension is an analytic tool, rather than a rigid coding category. This provides the researcher with the ability to conduct a systematic, but flexible analysis of the political news framing of various regions.

5.4 Source Criticism and Limitations

The study has potential for selection bias in that the selected outlets will likely be unable to represent all of the various local views in a region. My interpretation and the fact that much of the data was collected through an intermediary (e.g., English translation) and/or had to be translated from Turkish or Kurdish into English also limit how well the research can account for Kurdish-language content from, for example, *Xwebun*. Also, establishing causality in this study is problematic. Media reflects regional cultural norms and values, or can help create them. These two areas are likely intertwined. Also, archival limitations (i.e., limited availability of back issues) and time constraints have limited the dataset, since many local newspapers do not make archives available beyond a few years.

5.5 Statement on the Use of AI Tools

I used several AI tools for support, while utilizing these, I made sure all uses aligned with the Policy on the Use of AI at Linköping University. The objective for this use was to streamline parts of the research process, such as early literature filtering and linguistic cleanup, maximizing the time available for analysis and the development of independent arguments. Initial literature review was aided by the Elicit search tool, which I used alongside traditional library database searches to filter relevant abstracts, identify thematic clusters, and organize preliminary lists of potential sources. While helpful for early source research, the final selection, critical reading, and detailed analysis of

sources were entirely manual and done by me. I also relied on Gemini, Claude, and ChatGPT for linguistic assistance and refining the final draft. This assistance was focused on catching basic grammatical errors, correcting minor typos, and offering suggestions to make my sentences flow more smoothly in an academic context. It is important to mention that no AI was involved in generating any core theoretical content, insights, or conclusions. It also did not make any changes to my text but rather gave suggestions. Arguments, selection of theory, and the synthesis of results are the product of my independent effort, and I take full responsibility for the integrity of the content in this bachelor's thesis.

5.6 Validity and Reliability

While qualitative research has the advantage of providing a detailed and relevant (to the subject) understanding of social phenomena, there are some inherent disadvantages with this type of research. Some of the most common criticisms of qualitative research include the small sample size, which can limit the possibility of making generalizations to larger populations; researcher bias; and the lack of clarity and/or difficulty in reproducing the research process.

To address the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, researchers have developed specific criteria for conducting qualitative research that differ from those of quantitative research, such as the enhancement of construct validity in qualitative research when researchers define their constructs (such as framing, tone, and values) clearly and use multiple data sources to provide context for their analysis. Due to the nature of qualitative research and the regional focus of the research design used in this study, external validity will likely be limited. However, the findings of the research are not meant to be generalized statistically; they are to add to the existing literature an analytic contribution to the understanding of regional political media cultures.

To enhance the reliability of qualitative research, the level of transparency is critical. In addition to being transparent about the research process, sampling procedure, and the analytical methods employed, researchers should document all aspects of the research process so that readers

can trace the path taken by the researcher to reach the conclusions of the research. While it is likely impossible to replicate the research exactly, documenting the research process provides an additional layer of credibility to the results of the study.

By being aware of the limitations associated with qualitative research and by employing well-established qualitative research standards, the goal of this study is to generate findings that are both analytically robust and methodologically sound.

Chapter 6 – Empirical Analysis: Regional Differences in Political News Coverage

6.1 Regional Variations in Political Tone

Eastern Media Outlets

The Eastern local media adopts a tone of resistance and solidarity through the depiction of the DEM Party as the righteous representative of the collective political struggle. These outlets capture the Kurdish political demands not as a threat to national unity, but rather as a legitimate claim that leads to a possible peace in the region. Eastern media coverage consistently employs the language of resistance and collective struggle. “Birleşe birleşe kazanacağız” (together we will win), the title chosen by *Tunceli Emek*, is an example of the unity within the community. The coverage frames political demands as calls for equality and recognition within the Turkish political system, to legitimize the very existence of the Kurdish and other minority groups. This aligns with Sarigil and Karakoc’s (2016) finding that “perceived discrimination is the most consistent predictor” (p.328) of secessionist attitudes. Eastern media coverage consistently frames political issues through the lens of collective rights: Serhat News’s coverage of DEM Party’s “danışma meclisi” (consultative council) model represents an alternative vision of democracy where the decision would be made on a collective basis, one based on decentralization. This framing challenges the centralized Turkish state model and presents local autonomy as both democratic and practical.

Another point in the Eastern media’s tone can be named as the representation of the AKP government as the coercive power, whose kayyim appointments have caused a great deal of damage to the Kurdish identity and values in the region. These trustees are depicted as the ultimate face of “corruption, irregularities, and recklessness” (Tigris Haber, 2024), and their actions as “cultural genocide” (Serhat News, 2024). AKP is also scrutinized for the escalation in political tension in the Kurdistan region by advocating the militarization of UAVs andUCAVs in the area (Serhat News, 2023), and is often called the ‘evil regime’ (“Bûldan û Sancar,” 2022).

Perhaps the most powerful use of tone and language by local Eastern media outlets is their integration of local cultural elements and the local language. It can be seen that the news articles use the place names in Kurdish, such as Wêranşar, Hezex, Şirnex, and Stêwr (Mezopotamya Ajansı, 2024). The Kurdish cultural events are associated and described with ‘national unity’ by quoting slogans “*Her der Newroz, her dem azadî*” (Serhat News, 2023), empowering a stronger cultural presence in the region.

Central Anatolian Outlets

The tone that central Anatolian news outlets utilize, on the other hand, adopts a more emotional and moral register, which dramatically opposes the opposition media. The dominant themes used to make up the framing contain *şükür/teşekkür* (Eng: gratitude) to the government and *gurur/iftihar* (Eng: pride), as well as devotion to *hizmet* (Eng: service). Terms like *hizmet* also carry religious resonance in Turkish political discourse, particularly within AKP’s political tradition, which emerged partly from *cemaat* (Eng: religious communities) that emphasized service to the community. When mayors promise *hizmet*, they are not just offering administrative services but positioning themselves within a moral framework of dedicated service to the community as a form of religious virtue. Kütahya Postası, in their May 2024 article, incorporated this particular language that emphasizes *hizmet* as the guide to their governance in the Altıntaş Municipality (Kütahya Postası, 2024). The emphasis on the service is not highlighted pre-elections, but rather the propaganda is carried out in general (Yeni Aksaray, 2025)

The meta-concepts of ‘unity’ and ‘wholeness’ contribute to the ultimate conservative values portfolio, which prioritizes creating a community for AKP, not based on a particular ideology, but rather a collective purpose over pluralism, which can be adopted by a group of people from different ideological backgrounds. Thus, the ‘birlik’ term serves as a differentiation for pro-government local media, where the news titles such as “We’re so glad to make up a unified Konya” (Yeni Konya, 2023).

Pro-AKP media outlets in Central Anatolia also reiterate the importance of the concept of *millî irade* (Eng: national will), carrying a specific political meaning. It is used as a media apparatus in their framing of elections to produce not just governmental authority, but as an ultimate national will that should be accepted with no hesitation. As depicted by Erciyes Haber, the *millî irade* discourse is delivered through statements of AKP members, where they “condemn the mentality that insults the national will” (Erciyes Haber, 2024). This framing leaves little room for the legitimacy of opposition, critical media, or institutional resistance, all of which can be portrayed as obstructing the democratically expressed will of the majority.

Central Anatolia news also has an authoritative, condescending, and self-righteous tone in its coverage of political parties. The tone of that reporting was also used when recalling Erdoğan’s 2017 criticism of the Felicity Party’s ‘no’ vote with the HDP, to portray the opposition's alliance as both a moral failure and a ‘twist of fate.’ (Yeni Konya, 2023) That tone shows the president as having the authority to evaluate the true intentions of his political adversaries, and reinforces a hierarchical structure for the government as a natural consensus of all Turks, while portraying the opposition as being made up of confusing and thus illegitimate mixes of Turkish citizens.

Central Anatolian coverage consistently employs language of pride and celebration. This includes the coverage of genuine enthusiasm about development projects and public services in ways that may appear propagandistic to opposition audiences but reflect authentic regional political culture. The language of *müjde* (Eng: good news), used as the celebration of tangible achievements, suggests that this region’s political culture genuinely values visible material progress as the primary measure of good governance. Headlines featuring “*müjde üstüne müjde*” (Eng: good news upon good news) and coverage of being named World Sports Capital frame political developments as causes for celebration and collective pride. The tone is not defensive nor aggrieved but triumphant and confident.

Western Outlets

The tone combines elements of alarm-raising voice against the loss of democracy, the determination to continue the struggle, and self-righteousness to be the “watchmen” of the republican principles (9 Eylül Gazetesi, 2024). The word “*mücadele*” (Eng: struggle) sets a polarizing tone, mostly against the governing party and its media extensions (Akdeniz Gerçek Gazetesi, 2023). There is frequent use of legal and constitutional language *hak* (Eng: right), *hukuk* (Eng: law), *adalet* (Eng: justice), and *millî irade* that frames political struggles in terms of principle and legality rather than identity or interest (Gazetem İzmir, 2023). This reflects the secular-republican tradition’s emphasis on universalist values and institutions. The metaphor of the elections as a “*bahar*” (Eng: spring) in the Western local media is another common figure of speech, employing hopeful, renewal-oriented connotations (Talak, 2024; Akdeniz Gerçek Gazetesi, 2023; Edirne Gazetesi, 2023). The tone of positivity can be seen to be adopted for titles concerning the Millet coalition gatherings, events, and meetings: “*Millet’in İzmir Sevinci*” (9 Eylül, 2023). The 2024 local elections results were depicted as “CHP buzz” (Manisa Olay, 2024).

The tone toward the AKP government is accusatory and dismissive since they are portrayed as violating constitutional principles and betraying the republic. When İzGazete reports that “*millî iradeye yapılan darbe*” (the coup against the national will), shortly after the biggest opposition political figure, İmamoğlu, it employs the dramatic language that frames government actions as fundamentally illegitimate and undemocratic (2025). The controversial arrest of Can Atalay, an MP opposing AKP, similarly found coverage in Western sources with a similar metaphor of “*Hukukun üstünlüğü ve millî iradeye darbe*” (Eng: the coup against the supremacy of law and the national will) (İz Gazete, 2023).

6.2. Issue Focus and Agenda Priorities Across Regions

Eastern Outlets

Local newspapers in Eastern Turkey cover economic issues. The most significant topics to report by these outlets include unemployment, income disparity, rising cost of living, and larger

systemic problems pertaining to the infrastructure in the region (Tunceli Emek, 2023; Mezopotamya Ajansı, 2024). Mehmet Gür from Serhat News reports: “Voices of rebellion are rising in the streets of Van, where the economic crisis deepens. Stating that they remained hungry and thirsty until the evening after leaving home in the morning, Van residents noted that the economic crisis had turned their lives upside down”, stressing the shortcomings in public transport management, public services, urban planning, and industrialization that they believe disproportionately affect the area (Serhat News, 2023).

These sources additionally focus on social issues that have long existed in the region: Rejection of the Kurdish identity by the state, intolerance of diversity, women’s rights, and LGBTQ+ rights issues (Abi, Serhat News, 2023), and the failure of preserving the local culture/language. Most prominently, Kurdish, Alevi, and Zaza cultural elements and events are shared to maintain the ethnic and cultural diversity in the region (Serhat News, 2022; Tunceli Emek Gazetesi, 2023).

Political developments are of great significance for the local media in Eastern Turkey. News, including the dynamics between the Turkish State and Kurdish political actors such as Abdullah Öcalan and Selahattin Demirtaş (Xwebûn, 2023), as well as the discussions of possible peace negotiations between Turks and Kurds (Tigris Haber, 2024; Mezopotamya Ajansı, 2024), finds coverage quite extensively. Specifically, the political blockade that AKP has over DEM Party operations in the region, quoting Çandar from DEM Party, “The entire opposition, especially the Kurdish opposition, was suppressed. With the 2018 election, Turkey constitutionally transitioned to a system resembling a Presidential Tribe” (Tigris Haber, 2024). The appointment of kayyims to replace elected mayors has been one of the most popular topics covered by the media in the Eastern region (Mezopotamya Ajansı, 2024). As such, local newspapers in eastern Turkey serve as both informational resources and as critical forums for regional political critique.

Central Anatolian Outlets

Central Anatolian media outlets, on the other hand, centralize their coverage around Erdoğan and AKP's agenda at the given time. The news mostly handles local municipalities' operations to develop the respective cities, while drawing a parallel to the development targets on a national scale set by Erdoğan. While the economic turbulence finds a platform in these outlets, the focus is shifted to the positive updates, such as the inflation rate hitting its lowest in the recent 14 months (Yeni Konya, 2023). The regional developmental plans, important meetings involving AKP-related organizations, and certain achievements are also marketed through these news outlets (Kesin Karar, 2023).

Crucially, while focusing on AKP's political agenda such as the 'strong decision-maker' role that Turkey plays in the international arena, the stark image of an idolized leader and the 'intermediary-leaders' that follow his doctrines and act as a bridge between the local groups and the idolized President Erdoğan (Kesin Karar, 2023; Yeni Aksaray 2023; Yeni Konya, 2023), whereas the opposition-related news or event find little to no coverage. National holidays, particularly 15 July Democracy and National Unity Day of Türkiye, which was established during Erdoğan's rule, find significant spotlight in Central Anatolian sources.

Western Outlets

The Western local media outlets focus heavily on the economic and social hardship that Turkey has been going through since the late 2000s, vocalizing issues such as financial struggles among pensioners, young adults, and low-class citizens as a result of Turkey's governing policies (Akdeniz Gerçek Gazetesi, 2023). The ever-growing issue of unemployment, low pension rates (Gazete 9 Eylül, 2023), and brain drain (Ege Telgraf Gazetesi, 2023) finds thorough coverage. Social and human rights issues such as freedom of expression, press censorship, the maltreatment of women, and minority groups within the society (9 Eylül Gazetesi, 2023). By adopting a critical narrative towards the government, Western local news media tend to portray the ruling population as being responsible for the mismanagement.

Western media outlets, particularly in coverage of CHP municipalities, emphasize economic competence, service delivery, and the contrast between well-managed opposition cities and struggling AKP-run areas despite the lack of governmental financial support in local initiatives, leaving the population there out like a “stepchild” (Akdeniz Gerçek Gazetesi, 2024).

Importantly, the local media sources in Western Turkey centerpiece the pressure CHP-run municipalities endure from the central government: Lost resources, legal investigations, trustees, detention of local officials. The coverage of appointed trustees find platform regardless of the targeted party/municipality (İz Gazete, 2024). Consequently, it can be seen that these outlets puts a strong emphasis on undemocratic practices happening to the opposition parties.

6.3. Normative Values and Moral Frameworks in Regional Media

Eastern Outlets

A unique combination of ethics, which emerged from the distinct history of political and cultural exclusion, is reflected by the media outlets in the Eastern part of Turkey. These sources consistently publicize the legitimacy of Kurdish politics and existence, as well as the social, and therefore aim to be protected and recognized. As a result of this identity politics, figures such as Abdullah Öcalan play an important role in setting the representative values for the Kurdish community (Bâso, 2024; Mezopotamya Ajansı, 2024).

This will to be recognized reflects the finding systems and culture, to validate the Kurdish identity in the public sphere. The Kurdish identity is that “a kind of self-rule or special status within existing borders...involving arrangements such as decentralization and devolution of power” (Sarigil & Karakoc, 2016, p.333). By adopting these values, journalism is situated as a tool of civic practice of greater gravity, taking an active initiative to protect the dignity and memory of Kurdish and local communities. The perseverance of the colourful identity of the region is mostly achieved by using local languages and celebrating traditions (Serhat News, 2023; Tunceli Emek, 2023).

Additionally, Eastern outlets promote a more democratic and pluralist journalism in their approach. The purpose of collectivism is not achieved through abstract ideas, but rather through concepts of collective participation (Serhat News, 2024) and autonomous decision-making to achieve ‘*eşit temsiliyet*’ (Eng: equal representation) (Mezopotamya Ajansı, 2024). Most local sources support decentralization in governmental rule and fully functioning governance systems, starting with local governance bodies. In this light, the Eastern sources challenge the central state and redefine democracy as a discussed process among various demographic, political, socio-economic, or religious groups. Therefore, according to these outlets, normalizing dissent, protest, opposition, and having a spectrum of ideas within society is a non-negotiable value.

Central Anatolian Outlets

Perhaps the biggest value source that Central Anatolian outlets have is the figure of President Erdoğan, and secondarily, the intermediary leaders who serve as the reflection of Erdoğan’s principles. The same understanding of social, religious, political, and epistemic values is vocalized by the local media outlets in the region (Yeni Konya, 2023; Yeni Aksaray, 2024).

Central Anatolian local media embodies a value system consisting of moral order, which is articulated through a lexicon saturated with affective signifiers such as gratitude, pride, and service. These terms go beyond serving as rhetorical flourishes and act as the normative principles through which governance is legitimized. The implementation of moral values into the AKP’s political basis makes it possible to achieve the political action being rendered virtuous. The reference to *hizmet* transforms the daily operational administrative competence into an ethical calling with a greater purpose born out of the sense of piety.

Furthermore, the focus on unity and social togetherness is a central concept that central Anatolian outlets utilize to stress ideological plurality and collective purpose frequently. This notion has emerged from the *milli görüş* (Eng: National Outlook) ideology, which was brought into Turkish political life in the early 1970s. As Kayseri Haber published, AKP Mayor Büyükkılıç vocalizes the embodiment of this tradition as, “We are the true owners, true servants, and true

children of the local and national outlook” (Kayseri Haber, 2024). The imagined cohesive community is produced and bound by shared goals of national unity and togetherness. This focus on cohesion aids the moral good in the social body, allowing pro-government local media to naturalize consensus while still maintaining the democratic facade.

Among the foundational values set, the sacralization of the concept of national will is depicted as a moral absolute. Electoral outcomes are treated as an unquestionable endowment of the citizens’ choice, acquiring an ethical supremacy that nullifies the critique that is frequently portrayed as obstructive. The local news acts as an interpreter of an already-decided popular will. This mechanism can be traced back to the existential threat the Milli Görüş parties had endured as to why it came into being: The national will is used to legitimize the continuation of AKP’s political activities.

Western Outlets

The local media in Western Turkey advocate a different set of value systems that foreground socioeconomic justice, accountability, civic responsibility, secularist, and republican teachings of Atatürk (9 Eylül Gazetesi, 2024; Akdeniz Gerçek, 2024; İz Gazete, 2023) . The editorial priorities justify the perseverance of justice and equality to better not only the material conditions in the everyday lives of the citizens, but also to fix the moral decay that they claim to have grown within the society as a result of the recent policy choices. The persistent focus on social inequality and minority rights further signals this commitment to mend the broken social values in Turkey. Therefore, it can be suggested that Western local journalism endorses a normative stance without reservations, which in this context can be further interpreted as a part of the incredulous narrative towards the current political power holders in Turkey.

As a way to complement the aforementioned socioeconomic orientation, the republican-legalist value framework is entrenched to narrate the political conflict in the language of constitutional order. These outlets situate themselves as custodians of several norms, such as hak,

hukuk, and adalet (Akdeniz Gerçek, 2023), to wage war against the undemocratic and anti-republican wrongdoings of the current government, which goes against the very foundations of Kemalism. The juridical terminology paves the way to a form of moral dichotomization of principles. Coverage of investigations, detentions, trusteeship practices, and fiscal/local marginalization demonstrates the narrative of asymmetrical power and further criticizes the anti-republican set of values (İz Gazete, 2024). However, these sources often sustain a forward-looking ethos of resistance and employ a positive hopefulness regarding the future of the country (Edirne Gazetesi, 2023; Talak, 2024; Akdeniz Gerçek, 2023).

Taken together, these values position Western local media as agents of oppositional civic pedagogy: Simultaneously diagnosing democratic decline and affirming the possibility of institutional restoration through electoral and legal means. The values mentioned above make local media in the West, as a whole, part of an oppositional civic pedagogy that diagnoses the decline of democracy and affirms the possibility of restoring institutions democratically through election law and/or legal means.

6.4. Cross-Regional Comparison

It can be said that the media sources from all three regions highlight different political subjects depending on the regional paradigms and political discourse. The Eastern media appoints the DEM Party at the center of its attention, and perhaps depicts the party as the biggest legitimate representative of minority groups in the region to strengthen their narrative for regional recognition, participatory/collective democracy, and cultural preservation. Similarly, Western media sources in Turkey have the opposition (mainly CHP) parties in their radars, tackling issues concerning the economy, institutional/republican integrity, anti-authoritarianism, undemocratic practices in judicial system, corruption scandals and so on, while Central Anatolian newspapers shift their focus to a more conservative (both in religious and political terms) agenda, and stress the achievements of

AKP and the meta-figure of President Erdoğan & his intermediary representatives, leaving little to no room for the coverage of other parties.

The tone exercised by Eastern sources promotes solidarity and resistance, similar to the Western outlets, while differing in their focus of struggle: It is evident that Eastern sources situate the Kurdish suppression issue at the center to base the demographic solidarity around, while Western sources target a wider audience to base their struggle for a democratic and Kemalist republic. Both regions show the same level of skepticism towards AKP due to several factors, and outlets from both regions handle the kayyım news on a large scale, stressing the undemocratic texture lying underneath these practices. At the same time, sources from central Anatolia express themselves in tones of gratitude, pride, and loyalty and use an impressive amount of religiously resonant language to cover AKP and Erdoğan in a positive light.

Lastly, Eastern media emphasize mostly collective rights, equality between ethnic groups, local self-determination, and cultural preservation as a means of political presence. For democratic practices in general, participation, inclusiveness, and the recognition of special identities are essential. It can be suggested that Western media proceeds with a similar set of values, consisting of social equality, supremacy of democracy, secular institutionalism, individual/minority rights, and political poliphony. Additionally, Western newspapers put a premium on Kemalist values, which can be viewed as discordant with some of the Eastern and Central Anatolian news sources. Central Anatolian media emphasize national togetherness, national will, stability through strong leadership, and loyalty to democratically legitimized authorities.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Main Findings

The purpose of this thesis was to explore and compare the ways in which political news coverage has been reported across Turkey's three major geographic regions since the elections held in 2023-2025. Utilizing qualitative comparative content analysis of articles from twenty-one regional newspapers, it was found that there were significant differences in tone, focus, and values within the news coverage of each of the three regions. It was determined that the "Three Turkeys" model of regional political culture accurately predicted the ways in which the media covered news stories.

All three dimensions were found to be significantly different:

There were two specific patterns that emerged from the data collected from the eastern media outlets. Specifically, the eastern media outlets produced stories that were written in a resistant and a solidarity tone. The most common topics that were addressed in the eastern media included the repression of political dissidents such as Öcalan, the appointment of trustees to municipalities, economic inequity, and peace negotiations with the PKK. In general, the eastern media presented the DEM Party as a legitimate representative of Kurdish political interests and not as a security threat. The eastern media portrayed the AKP government as an oppressive regime that was attempting to erase the cultural identity of Kurds. The dominant theme in the eastern media was the protection of the collective rights and cultural identity of Kurds. Journalism in the east is viewed not only as a way of reporting on political events but also as a means of protecting Kurdish cultural identity.

In contrast to the eastern media, the media outlets located in the West portrayed the country in a very different manner. The West used an alarmist tone and focused on opposition to the AKP government, using the secular republican values that had been established in Turkey under the

leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. While the Western media did provide some coverage of the economic mismanagement of the Turkish economy, they provided much greater coverage of the decay of institutions in Turkey and what they portrayed as widespread abuses of power by the AKP government. The western media portrayed the journalists working for those outlets as defenders of the rule of law and the constitution in Turkey and invoked terms such as *hukuk*, *adalet*, and *millî irade* to criticize the actions of the AKP government. The emphasis on the rule of law and accountability in the Western media represented the self-image of the people who live in the coastal provinces of Turkey as being the defenders of democratic and modernistic values.

In stark contrast to both the eastern and western media outlets, the media outlets located in central Anatolia produced stories that were written in a tone of gratitude and pride toward the leadership of the AKP party and President Erdoğan. The stories produced by the media outlets in central Anatolia were characterized by a sense of moral confidence in the leadership of the AKP party and the policies implemented by that party. The development projects undertaken by the AKP government received extensive coverage in the media outlets in central Anatolia, as did the accomplishments of the AKP government. There was little coverage of the opposition parties in the media outlets in the region. It is evident to see discourses such as *hizmet*, *milli birlik*, and *milli irade* being reiterated by the media sources to evoke conservative/Islamic resonance of the AKP and to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the party simultaneously. The themes of national unity and hierarchical authority were treated in the stories produced by the media outlets in central Anatolia as if they were unproblematic and self-evident, consistent with the conservative religious political culture of that region of Turkey. This particular culture allowed the AKP party to translate its electoral dominance into a form of moral authority.

A surprising finding from the analysis of the media outlets was that although the eastern and western media outlets have fundamental ideological differences regarding the role of the state in society, they have developed a common ‘language of resistance’ to the perceived state authoritarianism that they see as threatening democracy in Turkey. One of the most common forms

of resistance that has been employed by both sets of media outlets is the criticism of trustee appointments. Both the eastern and western media outlets have criticized the appointment of trustees as a form of state authoritarianism. The fact that the two sets of media outlets have developed a common language of resistance to state authoritarianism despite the many other differences between them may suggest that the experience of being marginalized may create new forms of coalition-building that can cross regional lines, which is a finding that undermines the simplistic tripartite division of the ‘Three Turkeys’ model of regional political culture.

7.2 Relationship of the Findings of this Study to Theoretical Frameworks and Prior Research

The findings of this study confirm and expand upon the findings of previous studies in several important ways. First, the findings of this study support the findings of Akarca and Başlevent (2010) and Bekaroğlu and Osmanbaşıoğlu (2020) regarding the persistence of regional voting patterns in Turkey. The findings of this study demonstrate that the political cultures of the Eastern, Western, and Central Anatolian regions in Turkey are reflected in both electoral voting behavior and the reporting of political news of the media in those regions.

The above indicates that political culture is a determining factor not just in voter choice but also as an underlying framework through which voters make sense of events, determine the legitimacy of actors, and invoke values when discussing politics. According to Blaydes & Grimmer (2019), people are members of “Political Sub-Cultures” which have “similarly expressed value profiles” (p.2). This thesis illustrates that these subcultures have geographic manifestations of their values in regional news content.

Second, the findings of this study support the outcomes of Sarigil and Karakoç (2016) that perceived discrimination by the state is the primary reason that Kurds support autonomy. The findings of this study further support the findings of Sarigil and Karakoç (2016) by demonstrating that the perception of discrimination by the state is reflected in the reporting of the media in the

east. As such, the consistent representation by the Eastern press of the Turkish State as a source of coercion, the representation of trustee appointments as “cultural genocide,” and the stress of the collective rights demonstrate the “relative deprivation” framework identified by Sarigil and Karakoç.

This study includes a significant additional element: The media outlets themselves act as political socialization agencies that can reinforce beliefs regarding discrimination. As long as the Eastern press represents government actions using ethnic oppression and cultural eradication as their framework for understanding, they will also reinforce the grievances that Sarigil and Karakoc were measuring in their surveys. This would suggest a recursive relationship between political attitudes, media framing, and the development of collective identities.

Finally, the findings of this study expand upon framing theory (Entman, 1993; Yeşil, 2016; Panayırıcı et al., 2016) by providing evidence that the geographical location of the media outlet influences the frames that are employed to report on political events in addition to the frames that are employed to report on political events based on whether the outlet is pro-government or anti-government. Research about the Turkish media has been based on distinguishing between government supporters and opposition media (Coşkun, 2020; Panayırıcı et al., 2016). This research is demonstrating that a regional political culture is another (possibly even more fundamental) factor that contributes to how frames differ in the media.

Although, for instance, media from both the East and West of Turkey are opposition-oriented and use differing frames: In the East of Turkey, frames center on the idea of collective rights and cultural recognition. In the West of Turkey, frames are centered on constitutional legalism and republican values. Also, although media in Central Anatolia are uniformly pro-government, they don't just repeat the official discourse; they express this in terms of the local moral language (*hizmet, milli görüş, şükür*), which is relevant to the region's conservative-religious political culture. The findings suggest that Entman's (1993) concept, which describes how frames provide the

“diagnosis,” “evaluation,” and “prescription” (p.52) for a particular situation, should also be understood as being contextualized by specific cultural circumstances. Depending upon the regional context in which journalists and their audience are situated, a single political event (for example, appointing trustees) will create entirely different frames for diagnosis (the appointment of trustees is a constitutional violation vs. the appointment of trustees is cultural genocide vs. the appointment of trustees is necessary for national security).

7.3 Societal Implications and Limitations

Regional media systems serve both as mirrors of and architects of political identities; separating these functions is difficult. What is clear is that when individuals consume media from their own region, they are exposed to vastly different accounts of the same political events. Over time, this results in what may be referred to as separate informational environments, not simply different interpretations of a shared reality, but fundamentally different understandings of what constitutes political reality in the first place.

The implications of the creation of separate informational environments for democratic deliberation are concerning. When western coastal audiences interpret the appointment of trustees through the lens of violations of the constitution and central Anatolian audiences interpret the same events as necessary measures taken by the state to counter terrorism, the potential for national political discussion of the issues that divide those groups is rapidly diminishing. The regional divisions of the media do not simply reflect pre-existing political divisions; they reinforce those divisions by developing mutually exclusive frameworks for making sense of politics.

There are several limitations that affect the study’s scope and, therefore, need to be taken into account when interpreting the study's results. First, the selection of media outlets may not represent all of the views represented by each area, and pro-AKP media exist in both the East and West, as well as opposition voices continue to exist in Central Anatolia, though both are limited by structural barriers. Second, due to the small sample size of approximately 47 articles, the study is limited in

terms of generalizing the results to larger populations. Third, translation issues were present throughout the study, especially with regard to content published in Kurdish, which will always result in some level of interpretation error. Lastly, the study does not address causation. *Are media outlets reflecting existing political culture, or do they help create it?* In reality, it is likely a combination of both mechanisms; however, to determine the degree to which each mechanism contributes to the construction of political culture would require longitudinal studies focused on media audience reception and effect, which fall outside of the scope of this thesis.

Finally, archival limitations further restricted the research. Many of the regional outlets studied did not maintain digital archives that extend far enough into their history to allow for comparisons over time. The thesis exclusively examines media content and not audience reception/efficacy, which raises many unanswered questions about how readers actually interpret and react to stories told in regional media.

7.4 Directions for Future Research

This study could pave the way for further research with a few adjustments, where future studies could tackle a different political regional division concept, therefore focusing on additional geographical regions' political behaviour and the parallelism between their local media. A larger scale of materials can be used for a wider research that includes both old-school and digital media, such as TV/digital programs, articles, videos, and non-profit social media posts over multiple electoral cycles or focusing on a wider time frame, are among the possibilities for future research.

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