

UNIVERSITY IN THE NEWS

2022

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT



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UNIVERSITY IN THE NEWS

INTRODUCTION

In the second section of our university reports named *University in the News*, we will delve into the representation of university students and universities in government-friendly media outlets with a comprehensive approach. We will construct the theoretical and methodological framework of our analysis by examining news narratives and framing techniques.

Frames can be defined as relatively stable and socially shared categories/classification systems that individuals resort to in order to make sense of new information. On one hand, people read new information/news within these frames; on the other hand, the media employs frames in the presentation of information/news. Framing essentially involves selection and emphasis.

In this sense, how does the news engage in framing an issue? We understand that news articles are not merely “informative” but rather heavily ideological texts. The textual construct of news frames a subject by defining the problems, delineating causal connections, engaging in moral evaluations, and proffering both explicit and implicit resolutions.

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Discourse analysis, alongside framing analysis, aims to dissect the narrative structure and the constructed world of meaning within the text. Discourse, encompassing social actors and subjects, can be defined as institutionalized and established forms of speech and expression that classify, name, position, generate knowledge about, and exert power and constraints over these entities. It encompasses not only linguistic expressions but also embodied forms of expression manifested in practices and institutions. When examining patterns, commonalities, and relationships encompassing different texts and events, what we are scrutinizing is discourse. Discourse analysis delves beyond the surface of the text to explore the relationships, historical processes, and paradigms produced by words, terms, and concepts. Language operates as a site of ideological and political struggle, where form is as important as content.

In the forthcoming reports, we will conduct a comprehensive analysis of how political and opposition students are stigmatized as “enemies of religion,” “terrorists,” and “deviants.” Furthermore, we will examine the definition of an acceptable university student and the characterization of legitimate political activism. The representation of students advocating for their rights to housing and livelihood, as well as the portrayal of the AKP’s touted “university miracle” and the depiction of university students in judicial news, will also be examined with meticulous examples.

We hope that the reports we prepare contribute to the ideals of a democratic and inclusive university. Enjoy reading.

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TARGETING IN THE NEWS “ENEMIES OF RELIGION”

For the University II report on news coverage, we examined 300 news articles from A Haber, Akşam, Yeni Şafak, Takvim, Türkiye, Sabah, Yeni Akit, and Milli Gazete in 2022 that include university students. Based on these articles, we have prepared reports highlighting recurring patterns that stand out across different sources. The first report you are currently reading focuses on the portrayal of political and opposition university students as “enemies of religion.”

We conducted a detailed analysis of 22 articles on this subject. Within the overarching theme of “religion enmity,” prominent subtopics emerged, such as “defamation of religion” and “disparagement of religious beliefs.” Our subheadings were established by identifying the individuals targeted in these articles, the actions that were targeted, and the recurring emphases employed to legitimize the targeting.

When it comes to the subject of “religion enmity,” the religion in question is Islam. The asserted grounds for this hostility vary, ranging from a song lyric to a performance or statements made in a classroom. The descriptions used to label individuals involved in these incidents transitioned from student to “provocateur” and from academics to “impudent.” Within the emphasis on the judicial process to establish legitimacy, the outcome of acquittal did not alter the targeting. The actions taken against the targeted individuals were reported with a tone of “legitimacy,” while attempts were made to establish this legitimacy through opposition.

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1. WHO WERE TARGETED?

In the 22 news articles we examined, we observed that students, academics, or both groups were targeted as “enemies of religion.”

In the analysis of the 22 news articles, we found that students were targeted in eight articles, academics in eleven articles, and both groups in three articles.

1.1. “STUDENTS AS ENEMIES OF RELIGION”

The majority of the news articles targeting students focused on singling out an individual student who sang a song during an event. The headlines specifically mentioned the student's name, highlighting their involvement and making them the target of the article.



“New scandal from *****, the ringleader of provocations at Boğaziçi University! Mocking religious values like this!”

“Turkey witnessed a period of provocations at Boğaziçi University. The leader of these provocations, ***** , has now committed a new scandal. While allegedly singing a song to the crowd, ***** used the expression ‘Beware, Allah is speaking.’ *Takvim*, 23.5.22

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The news articles consistently highlighted the demonstrations that ensued following the appointment of a new rector at Boğaziçi University, often referring to them as “provocations.” The targeted student was also targeted due to participation in these protests. The news coverage predominantly revolved around a brief video clip capturing the moment when the student sang a song and uttered the phrase “Beware, Allah is speaking.”

Let us take a closer look at one of the news articles on this topic. The headline of the article, which featured the student’s name, included phrases such as “mocked religion” and “the leader of the actions disregarded religious values” (A Haber, 23 May 2022). The article itself consisted of a five-line summary and a one-line news text. The news text read, “The leading figure of the actions at Boğaziçi University, this time, mocked religious values.” The six-line article featured the video that was the subject of the news and included a screenshot from that video. By emphasizing the student’s “leadership,” the article aimed to convey that the incident extended beyond an individual act, but rather attributed it to the entire protest movement and its participants in general.

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“Insults to Islam under the name of 'Sacred Cow Festival' at Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences! Muslim students express their outrage.” [Takvim, 13.5.22](#)

In addition to individual targeting, there were also news articles that targeted all students during collective events. An example of such news articles emerged from the traditional “Sacred Cow Festival” (Kutsal İnek Bayramı) at Ankara University, where a student's performance dressed as an imam became the subject of targeting and news coverage.

In the news article published in Takvim newspaper on May 13, 2022, the video of the student dressed as an imam and photographs capturing that moment were presented with an emphasis on “insulting Islam.” The news text created a contrast between “students” and “Muslim students,” highlighting the reaction of the latter. These articles targeted both the student dressed as an imam by name and collectively targeted those who participated in the event.

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It is indeed noteworthy how the long-standing tradition of the Sacred Cow Festival, which has been in place for almost 80 years, was sensationalized as a brand-new scandal in the news, along with other highlighted aspects. Phrases like “a country that is 99% Muslim” and “likely to hold positions in the government in the coming years” were used to frame the requirements of being part of the government’s leadership. Describing the protesters as “Muslim students” not only created a sense of antagonism among other students but also made assumptions about the religious identities of a particular group of students, which is problematic.

1.2. “ACADEMICS AS ENEMIES OF RELIGION”

The news articles targeting academics were primarily focused on a specific academic who was singled out based on their statements during lectures. These articles often framed the academic’s remarks as “insults to the prophet” and highlighted their affiliation as a columnist for the opposition newspaper *Birgün*.



"Disgraceful scoundrel: Insulted our Prophet - Uğur Kutay, a writer for Birgün newspaper and an instructor at the Faculty of Arts and Design at Yıldız Technical University, insulted our Prophet (peace be upon him) and mocked him with hadiths during a lecture. Kutay responded to a protesting student by saying, "You are a product of the intellect imposed by Islamic propaganda." [Yeni Şafak, 14.12.22](#)

The "news article," which began with the insult "disgraceful scoundrel," characterized the statements of academic Uğur Kutay as an "unprecedented lowliness." While the article repeatedly claimed that Kutay insulted religion and the Islamic Prophet, there was very little explanation regarding the nature of these insults. Expressions that could be considered within the scope of freedom of thought, expression, analysis, and guaranteed by the constitution/international conventions and court decisions were defined as criminal acts. The articles identified the academic as an "instructor" and "Birgün columnist," and his photograph was also published.

II. HOW WERE THEY DEFINED?

The targeted students and academics were referred to as students or academics in the news, but that was never the sole word used to describe them. Especially the protests in which the students participated appeared as adjectives that continued to target them.

Here are some of the expressions used towards the students:

- Boğaziçi protester
- Ringleader of provocations
- Provocateurs mocking Islamic values
- Insulting lefties

Indeed, the distinction between “students” and “Muslim students” appeared in the news as well.

Türkiye'nin bürokratlarını yetiştiren önemli okullardan biri olan Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi'nde 'Kutsal İnek Bayramı' adı altında İslam'a hakaret edildi. Yüzde 99'u Müslüman bir ülkede ilerleyen yıllarda yönetim kadrolarında olma ihtimali bulunan öğrencilerin bu hareketlerine Müslüman öğrenciler ise tepki gösterdi.

“...Muslim students, on the other hand, reacted to the actions of the students.” Takvim 13.5.22

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Derogatory expressions such as “disgraceful scoundrel” and “impudent” were also used towards academics.

**Hadsizlere suç duyurusu!
Müslümanlardan müptezellere karşı
ortak tepki**

**İBDA'cılardan hakaretçi solaklara
müdahale**

**Rezil herif: Peygamber Efendimiz'e
hakaret etti**

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III. HOW DID THEY BECOME “ENEMIES OF RELIGION”?

In the news, being targeted as “enemies of religion” was often discussed under headings such as “blasphemy - disrespect towards religion” and “insults towards the prophet.”

In the news, regarding the accusations of blasphemy - disrespect towards religion, certain incidents stood out. One was the utterance of the phrase “Beware, Allah is speaking” while singing during an event. Another notable incident was a performance in traditional attire, including a turban and robe, as part of a traditional “Cow Festival” event. Additionally, an academic’s remarks during a lecture were reported as being associated with accusations of insulting the prophet.

IV. HOW DID LEGAL PROCESSES APPEAR IN THE NEWS?

In the news articles we examined under this heading, there was a notable emphasis on the “judicial process.” It was highlighted in the headlines of the eight news pieces that the complaints were filed and investigations were initiated.

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"Hz. Muhammed'e hakaret" soruşturmasında karar verildi! Dosya Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi'ne gönderildi

The decision has been made in the investigation of "insulting Prophet Muhammad"! The case has been sent to Yıldız Technical University. (A haber, 27.12.22).

Boğaziçi eylemcisi dini değerleri hedef aldı... Soruşturma başlatıldı

"Boğaziçi protestor targeted religious values... Investigation was initiated." (Akşam, 23.5.22)

The legal processes were used in the news to support the "guilt" of the individuals targeted. This emphasis remained consistent even in cases where the legal proceedings resulted in dismissal or acquittal.

A criminal complaint was filed based on a similar action in previous years against the student targeted due to the "Cow Festival" was reported with accusatory language in the news, despite the fact the process ended in acquittal.

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O PROVOKATÖR YİNE SAHNEDE

2016 yılında da benzeri yaşanan provokasyonun öncü ismi yine ██████████ ██████████ 2016 yılında da benzer eylemi gerçekleştirdiği için hakkında suç duyurusunda bulunan ve üniversiteden ceza alan ██████████ ██████████ geçtiğimiz aylarda beraat etmişti.

“THE PROVOCATEUR ON STAGE AGAIN - Mehmet Can Tan, the leading figure of a similar provocation that occurred in 2016, is once again in the spotlight. Tan, who faced criminal charges and disciplinary action from the university for a similar act in 2016, was acquitted in recent months.” Sabah, 13.5.22

Similarly, in the news regarding the academic, the decision of non-prosecution was also reported with headlines such as “a decision has been made about [the academic].”

GÜNDEM

Hız. Muhammed'e hakaret ettiği iddia edilmişti: Akademisyen hakkında karar verildi

Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesinde müfredat dışına çıkarak Hız. Muhammed'e hakaret ettiği iddia edilen öğretim görevlisi Uğur Kutay hakkında, ceza soruşturması yapma yetkisinin ilgili Üniversite Rektörlüğüne ait olması sebebiyle görevsizlik kararı verildi. Dosya Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü'ne gönderildi.

15:35 - 27/12/2022 Salı — DHA

“It was alleged that he insulted Prophet Muhammad: Decision made about the academic - Uğur Kutay, an instructor at Yıldız Technical University, who was accused of insulting Prophet Muhammad by deviating from the curriculum, was deemed to lack jurisdiction due to the authority to conduct criminal investigations belonging to the relevant University Rectorate. The case has been referred to Yıldız Technical University Rectorate” Yeni Şafak, 27.12.22

The language used in relation to legal processes, along with the emphasis in the headlines, progressed within the framework of portraying the targeted individual as “guilty,” suggesting that they had “already committed this crime before,” and implying that “the necessary actions will be taken.” This framework attempted to legitimize the act of targeting and vilifying.

V. WHAT WERE CONSIDERED REASONABLE ACTIONS?

While statements or actions perceived as insults to religion were prominently highlighted and subject to accusations, actions taken against such acts were portrayed in a completely different framework. These actions were presented under the framework of “legitimate responses to religious insults.”

In these publications, while student protests were portrayed with headlines such as “terrorism” and “propaganda,” the headlines regarding “actions taken against religious insults” were far from this negative language. When reporting on these actions, which they considered to fall under the “reasonable” category, they also used expressions such as “uprising,” “intervention,” and “sending them home” in a positive tone.

MÜSLÜMAN ÖĞRENCİLER TEPKİ GÖSTERDİ

Bu hakaretlere bazı Müslüman öğrenciler ise daha fazla dayanamadı. Okulda gelenek haline gelen ve İslami değerlerin ayak altına alındığı etkinliği basan o öğrenciler, büyük tepki gösterdi.

“Muslim students expressed their reactions” [Takvim](#), [13.5.22](#)

In these news articles, there was often a contrast that emerged among students. The targeted students were considered as one of the two sides, and the other side was labeled as “Muslim students” or “students with religious sensitivities.”

'İnek Bayramı' rezaleti ile ilgili Ankara Üniversitesi'nden açıklama: İnceleme başlatıldı...

Ankara Üniversitesi'nde bir grup 'İnek Bayramı' adı altında gerçekleştirdiği etkinlik ile İslami değerleri hedef almıştı. Duruma tepki gösteren bir grup öğrenci salona girerek, rezalete müdahale etmişti. Türkiye'nin gündemine oturan olay ile ilgili Ankara Üniversitesi'nden açıklama geldi. Açıklamada, skandal organizasyonla ilgili inceleme başlatıldığı duyuruldu.

“Statement from Ankara University regarding the ‘Cow Festival’ scandal: Investigation launched...”

A group of students at Ankara University had organized an event called the “Cow Festival,” which targeted Islamic values. In response, another group of students entered the venue and intervened in the scandalous event. The incident, which made headlines in Turkey, prompted a statement from Ankara University. The statement announced that an investigation has been launched into the scandalous organization.” Sabah, 16.5.22

The news article published in Sabah Newspaper regarding the “Cow Festival” above highlighted the intervention of those who reacted to the event and this was affirmed. Similar positive portrayals were observed in other headlines of this nature.

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Efendimiz'e (sav) dinsizce hakaret etmişti! YTÜ'deki Müslüman öğrenciler Uğur Kutay'a karşı ayaklandı

“He had insulted our Master (peace be upon him) in an irreligious manner! Muslim students at YTU protested against Uğur Kutay.” [Yeni Akit, 16.12.22](#)

The expression “protesting against” took on a negative tone in the news when it came to opposition students, however, in these news articles, “protesting against” was used in the context of “deserved consequences” regarding “reasonable actions.”

İBDA'cılardan hakaretçi solaklara müdahale

“Intervention by İBDA'ists against insulting lefties” [\(Yeni Akit, 18.12.22\)](#)

An example of a news article that best reflects the general framework of actions taken against the protests against targeting can be found in Yeni Akit. The article titled “[Intervention by İBDA'ists against insulting lefties](#)” covered an intervention by a group referred to as “İBDA'ists” against the support action for an academic who was targeted due to their remarks during a lecture.

In the news article, the slogans of the socialist organizations' joint statement were mentioned as “they roared.” The action taken against this protest was announced as “a group carrying İBDA flags dispersed the socialists and sent the secularists who supported the insult against Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) back to their homes.” Opposition newspapers, which reported the İBDA-flagged action as a “provocation,” were also targeted in the news.