UNLEASHING HATE: HOW TURKEY'S ANTI-STREET DOG MOVEMENT HIJACKED POLITICS

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Unleashing Hate:

How Turkey's Anti-Street Dog Movement Hijacked Politics

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- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
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ABSTRACT

Unleashing Hate:

How Turkey's Anti-Street Dog Movement Hijacked Politics

This thesis analyzes Turkey's anti-street dog movement as a local manifestation of alt-right discourse, and traces its evolution from being a fringe social media discourse to a mainstream political influence resulting in controversial legislative changes. Highlighting a notable gap in Human-Animal Studies (HAS) and Critical Animal Studies (CAS) concerning the conceptualization of street animals, the study argues this omission reflects epistemological biases rooted in Western contexts. Using computational and qualitative methodologies, including Twitter/X data, it finds that anti-street dog rhetoric is predominantly male-dominated, overlaps significantly with anti-feminist sentiments, and employs moralizing, securitizing, and populist frames characteristic of alt-right discourses. The research traces the trajectory of this discourse from online platforms through minor far-right parties into the governing AKP's political strategy following the party's 2024 electoral defeat. By co-opting this discourse, the AKP sponsored legislative amendments that reversed previous animal welfare protections, legitimizing mass relocation and culling of street dogs. The study underscores that this policy shift was driven less by genuine public demand than by elite misinterpretation of artificially amplified online visibility and the institutional embedding of extremist discourse. Ultimately, the study illustrates how marginal digital movements can substantially influence state policies under authoritarian contexts through elite co-optation and strategic framing, emphasizing the necessity for HAS/CAS scholars to engage more deeply with the lived realities of street animals in non-Western societies.

ÖZET

Nefretin Zincirlerini Kırmak:

Sokak Köpeği Karşıtı Hareketin Türk Siyasetini Ele Geçirişi

Bu tez, Türkiye'deki sokak köpeği karşıtı hareketi alt-right (alternatif sağ) söylemin yerel bir tezahürü olarak analiz etmekte ve bu hareketin sosyal medyada uç bir söylem olmaktan çıkıp tartışmalı yasal değişikliklerle sonuçlanan ana akım bir siyasi olguya dönüşmesinin izini sürmektedir. İnsan-Hayvan Çalışmaları (İHÇ) ve Eleştirel Hayvan Çalışmaları'nda (EHÇ) sokak hayvanlarının kavramsallaştırılmasına ilişkin kayda değer bir boşluk olduğunun altını çizen çalışma, bu boşluğun Batı bazlı bağlamlardan gelen epistemolojik önkabulleri yansıttığını savunmaktadır. Çalışma, Twitter/X verisi de dahil olmak üzere hesaplamalı ve nitel metodolojiler kullanarak, sokak köpeği karşıtı söylemin ağırlıklı olarak erkek egemen olduğunu, anti-feminist söylemlerle önemli ölçüde eklemlendiğini ve alternatif sağ söylemlerle özdeşleştirilen ahlakçı, güvenlikleştirici ve popülist çerçevelemeleri kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu araştırma, sözkonusu söylemin çevrimiçi platformlardan küçük aşırı sağ partilere ve 2024 seçimlerindeki yenilgisinin ardından iktidardaki AKP'nin siyasi stratejisine dahil olmasına dek izini sürmektedir. AKP, bu söylemi benimseyerek, önceki hayvan refahı korumalarını tersine çeviren, sokak köpeklerinin toplu olarak sürülmesini ve itlaf edilmesini meşrulaştıran yasal değişiklikleri mümkün kılmıştır. Çalışma, bu politika değişikliğinin gerçek bir kamu talebinden ziyade, yapay olarak güçlendirilmiş çevrimiçi görünürlüğün siyasi elitler tarafından yanlış yorumlanması ve aşırıcı söylemin küçük aşırı sağ pariler tarafından kurumsallaştırılmasından kaynaklandığını savunmaktadır.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC Animal Birth Control

AKP Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

BBP Büyük Birlik Partisi (Grand Union Party)

CAS Critical Animal Studies

CHP Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

CSV Comma-Seperated Value

EU European Union

GÜSODER Güvenli Sokaklar Derneği (Safe Streets Association)

HAS Human-Animal Studies

HayKonFed Hayvan Hakları Konfederasyonu (Confederation for Animal Rights)

İYİP İYİ Parti (The Good Party)

MHP Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)

MinHash LSH Min-wise Independent Permutations Locality Sensitive Hashing Scheme

YRP Yeniden Refah Partisi (New Welfare Party)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While Turkey is increasingly celebrated as a country where street cats rule, what started as a fringe movement on social media calling for the extermination of the country's street dogs has increasingly marched into the mainstream political discourse. Following the country's March 2024 local elections, the movement achieved its legislative goals through an amendment to the country's Law #5199 titled *On the Protection of Animals*, leading to ongoing state-sanctioned massacres of street dogs.

How and why did the country's street dogs become a topic of ideological divide and animosity? Using computational and qualitative methods, this study argues that Turkey's anti-street dog movement originated as a localized articulation of alt-right discourse. First emerging on Twitter/X and as Chapter 3 suggests, likely amplified through social media bots and content farming, the movement gained momentum by mobilizing moral and civilizational panic, securitizing rhetoric, and affectively charged language. At the center of this discourse stands the street dog: a figure that, as Fortuny (2014) observes, "serves no clear or tangible purpose" for humans, and is too often regarded as aesthetically displeasing, unruly, or even dangerous. The alt-right reflex to exclude finds fertile ground in this non-human target, whose existence in public space disrupts the imagined social order they seek to impose. The street dog, like other "unruly subjects" (Gündoğdu, 2018), embodies a kind of disorder that must be eliminated. Yet unlike the human "other"s, it does not need to be dehumanized – it is already non-human, and therefore easily expendable in a vision of order based on purity and control.

Partially in the lead-up to the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, and more extensively prior to the 2024 local elections, Turkey's minor far-right parties co-opted the alt-right anti-street dog discourse into their political platforms. The aftermath of the 2024 local elections, with the governing AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Justice and Development* Party) suffering from significant losses, ceded to the anti-street dog far-right parties as well as the social democratic opposition, resulting in the anti-street dog agenda being adopted by the AKP as well – who had reaffirmed the provisions of the original 2004 Law #5199 in a minor amendment requiring companion animals to be injected with microchips three years prior in 2021 (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi, n.d.).

In what follows, I will first contextualize the study's topic within the broader political atmosphere of contemporary Turkey and introduce the term alt-right as it will be operationalized through this study. I will then provide a brief outline of the thesis chapters before continuing with the study.

1.1 Far-Right, Alt-Right, and the charm of securitization

Turkey has been ruled by the right-wing AKP since its initial coming to power in 2002. Despite pursuing seemingly liberal policies and reforms in its initial years, which include the passing of the 2004 Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals (see Chapter 4), AKP's rule skewed increasingly toward an authoritarian populist one through the years. The AKP regime's transformation to competitive authoritarianism through the many turning points of its nearly 25-year history is a well-documented and vastly debated phenomenon in the political sociology and political science literatures (see Tuğal, 2009; Tekin, 2025; Scheppele, 2018).

Although securitarian rhetoric has arguably been a constant part of Turkish political life since the 1980 coup d'etat, justified by its perpetrators in the name of putting an end to the violent political strife in the country, its scope has been expanded during the so-called authoritarian years of AKP rule – especially so in the wake of the failed 2016 coup d'etat attempt against Erdoğan (Adısönmez & Onursal, 2021; Tekin, 2025). In contemporary Turkey, otherwise legal public gatherings and civil society events are often banned on the vague premise of "protection of the public order" (e.g., BirGün Politika Servisi, 2023; Soykan, 2025).

This expansion of securitarian logic is best understood through the framework of securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998; Balzacq et al., 2016). Securitization theory posits that political actors can frame particular issues as existential threats to justify what would be considered as extraordinary measures – such as the suspension of normal democratic procedures or the curtailing of rights and protections. In this process, the act of labeling something as a "security issue" is not merely descriptive but performative: it transforms the issue in question into a matter of urgency, legitimizing exceptional state responses. While the theory has traditionally been applied to areas such as terrorism or migration, this thesis shows how securitization has been extended to the domain of animal governance – namely, the reframing of street dogs as threats to public safety and the international outlook of the country.

However, as the alt-right playbook has spread globally through the movement's online presence and international scope, Turkey also gained an alt-right presence of its own. The emergence of a Turkish alt-right movement arguably added a twist to the Turkish political scene dominated by Turkey's "conventional" right-wing governing coalition led by AKP's Erdoğan. In the following section, I will

introduce the alt-right as a global political phenomenon before discussing how its local Turkish pronunciation differs from the Western alt-right, even though the alt-right is usually treated as a Western phenomenon. Establishing the distinction between the alt-right and far-right as used in this study, I will then provide a brief outline of the thesis chapters before continuing with the study.

1.2 Alt-right at home, alt-right in the world

Alt-right (derived from "alternative right") is a term used to connote a spectrum of contemporary right-wing political positions that are distinguished from what are now considered to be conventional right-wing and far-right ideologies. While heterogeneous, it is characterized by advocacy for an inequalitarian political order, often through appeals to perceived natural hierarchies among social and cultural groups (Miller-Idriss, 2020). The alt-right is generally considered to have begun manifesting itself as a political movement in the early 2010s, especially gaining momentum around 2013. The movement's impact further solidified following the beginning of US President Donald Trump's first term in 2017, who had the backing of many prominent alt-right ideologues (Rutherford, 2020; Hermansson et al., 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020).

Political scientist George Hawley (2019) notes that the alt-right movement is fascistic, notwithstanding the various definitions with different scopes of the word "fascist" in political theory. Here, Hawley (2019) highlights a broader definition of fascism, which understands it to be simply a belief in essentialist social identities, human inequality, and an immobile social hierarchy based on those beliefs; whereas a more strict definition of fascism designates it as a revolutionary political movement which aims to combat what it sees as decadent and undesirable elements

of the society through the abolition of liberal values and institutions. With its irreverence for democratic institutions and its reactionary identity politics, the alt-right thus satisfies the requirements of both definitions (Hawley, 2019). Moreover, Hawley (2019) also points out that many right-wing and far-right political ideologies, such as paleo-conservatism and right-libertarianism in the US, serve as bridges or "pathways" between right-wing party politics and alt-right ideas. Since the alt-right is not a homogenous set of ideas, what is non-alt-right right-wing actors can selectively and often gradually borrow alt-right talking points they deem to be useful and popular, also amplifying their legitimacy in the wider political discourse (Hawley, 2019; Miller-Idriss, 2020).

Yet, the alt-right movement as it manifests itself in North America and Western Europe also differs from conventional right-wing movements and ideologies in several key ways. Firstly, its core concern revolves around the perceived threat to the existence of white people, advocating for the protection of their "race" and the establishment of white ethno-states. This racial focus forms the foundation of the alt-right's worldview, setting it apart from conventional right-wing movements. Secondly, the alt-right's outlook is transnational, extending its conceptualization beyond the borders of nation-states. It is preoccupied with a transnational white "nation" or a transnational mythical West or Occident, differentiating it from traditional nation-state nationalism. Thirdly, the alt-right adopts a metapolitical approach, engaging in a war of social transformation at the level of worldview, thought, and culture. It not only seeks to recruit followers but also to change the so-called Overton Window, the scope of acceptable discourse in society (Eick, 2023). Emphasizing the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for long-term political transformation, it stands in contrast to conventional right-

wing political movements operating within the hegemonic political establishments of their respective nation-states. Moreover, the alt-right thought thrives online, utilizing the internet for recruitment, radicalization, and dissemination of its ideas. Disseminating a characteristic online subculture, it perpetrates its "cultural war" and politicizes a younger audience through digital media. The alt-right is thus better understood as an international phenomenon, as it maintains a transnational white nationalist outlook, further setting it apart from conventional right-wing movements primarily focused on national interests and traditional conservative values (Hermansson et al., 2020; Rutherford, 2020). Finally, its emergence and solidification mainly through online dissemination give it a grassroots quality and further distinguish it from conventional, top-down party politics (Miller-Idriss, 2020).

In sum, and in line with the literature outlined above, this study is founded on the following assumptions regarding its use of the term "alt-right," especially on its divergence from far-right: Firstly, the alt-right departs from traditional far-right formations by prioritizing metapolitical over electoral or institutional strategies, aiming to shift public perceptions through online subcultures, memes, and digital antagonism rather than through party politics. Thirdly, unlike the conventional nation-bound far-right movements, the alt-right operates with an interconnected, transnational imaginary. Finally, and more importantly, the alt-right presents itself as a "big tent" movement, often attracting people with vaguely social Darwinist, anti-establishment, or anti-political correctness sentiments before radicalizing them. This stands in contrast to typical far-right movements, which tend to be more rigid in their ideology. As a result, ideas circulated within alt-right discourse can appeal to and be

adopted by individuals across the political spectrum, and often in isolation from other alt-right viewpoints (Eick, 2023; Hawley, 2019).

Although the alt-right's main concerns on whiteness and protection of the Western civilization do not exactly translate to its Turkish pronunciation in the same manner, its disdain for what they view as "feminized" mass culture and promoting a return to masculine ideals, as well as their pursuit of purity and order through a rejection of progressive democratic values and a desire to maintain a social hierarchy (Hermansson et al., 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020) similarly underlies Turkey's alt-right. A more pronounced vein in the Turkish alt-right that separates it from Western alt-right's concerns, however, has been the desire to disalign the country from the East, which they see as primitive and below the Turkish identity's station – an effort that can arguably be traced back to the early Turkish Republic's anxiousness to establish Turkish whiteness (and therefore, Europeanness) as a credential of Turkey's modernity and civilizational parity with the West (Ergin, 2008). While not enjoying the hegemony it once did, Kemalism in its many forms is alive and well in Turkish social and political thought, serving as a fertile ground for alt-right views to take hold.

The hate, anger, and feeling of betrayal that characterizes the alt-right sentiment is directed in the Turkish alt-right movement not towards local non-White populations and immigrants as well as the progressive politicians who they think to have betrayed the white population, but towards the groups that they believe to be tarnishing the Turks' claims to whiteness and bar the country's development and modernization. Those groups include not only Kurds and immigrants from Syria and Afghanistan but also political actors and other individuals that they think are supporting them and hindering Turkey's development, including the governing AKP.

Much like their intellectual kin in the Western sphere (Hermansson et al., 2020), the Turkish alt-right uses selective readings of statistics and pseudo-scientific information to legitimize prejudicial and hateful attitudes, as well as portraying their opponents in the supposed culture wars as degenerates through the various discursive tools the internet offers them.

1.3 A note on terminology: defining street vs. stray animal

In Turkish, dogs living in the streets, often well-socialized and taken care of by neighborhood communities, are called *sokak köpeği* ('street dog'). Even though it may translate to the common English phrase "stray dog", the designation *başıboş köpek* is a recent innovation in Turkish vocabulary. Albeit it may initially seem trivial, the nuance between the two terms remains an important one. As Srinivasan (2012) aptly points out in her comparison of Indian and British legislations on ownerless dogs, designating the ownerless dog population at hand as *stray*s denotes a breach of norms marked by these animals' existence. On the other hand, the label *street dog* conveys an acknowledgment of the mode of existence of dogs dwelling in human communities without human ownership. The contrast between the two terms serves to distinguish between two different animal care regimes: British law, designating the said dogs as *stray*s, stipulates their placement in shelters, where local authorities are to decide what will be done to them if not adopted within 7 days[1]. On the other hand, as of 1996, Indian law enshrines the right to live of the dogs that it designates as *street dogs*, stipulating that local authorities shall adhere to the catch-sterilize-release doctrine to control the animal population, similarly to the original

[1] Before a 2007 amendment, the law stipulated the dogs to be put down if not adopted within 7 days (Srinivasan, 2012).

2004 Turkish law #5199. While noting that the lives of Indian street dogs offer little to romanticize about, Srinivasan (2012) points out that Indian legislation acknowledges their right to exist, unlike British law.

A literal translation of the term stray dog, the phrase *başıboş köpek* has recently entered the Turkish vocabulary with the anti-street dog movement, which frames its anti-street dog agenda in terms of a "stray dog problem" (*başıboş köpek sorunu*). While Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the use of this term and several others related to it on social media, political party campaigns, and parliamentary proceedings, the reader should be aware of the often-overlooked nuance between the English designations *street dog* and *stray dog*.

1.4 Overview and methodology

As previously mentioned, the study employs a mixed-method approach to analyze Turkey's anti-street dog movement. Chapter 2 offers a brief introduction to the study of non-human animals in social sciences, and outlines the multidisciplinary literature of Human-Animal Studies (HAS) and its more politically-oriented subset, Critical Animal Studies (CAS). Pointing out the Western epistemological bias in both literatures that defines domestic cats and dogs strictly as companion animals and overlooks the existence of the globe's street animal populations, it offers a brief history of Turkey's street animals and concludes on a call for animal studies scholars to produce knowledge about the politics of existence surrounding the livelihoods of street animals.

Chapter 3 establishes a timeline of the anti-street dog movement and uses Twitter/X data provided by Koç University's POLITUS project to analyze the gender distribution of the movement's online participants, the possibility of artificial

amplification of anti-street dog tweets, and the frequently used phrases (in the form of n-grams, i.e., sequence of adjacent phrases) by the movement's participants.

Chapter 4 analyzes content from political party manifestos and electoral campaigns, as well as sources from media outlets, legal texts, and parliamentary proceedings, to trace the amendment of Law #5199 in line with the anti-street dog movement's demands, its legal implications, and the public and political opposition that marked the process.

Building on these chapters, the Conclusion analyzes the mainstreaming process of the once-marginal anti-street dog movement from the perspectives of political elite consensus and political party linkage mechanisms. The conclusory chapter addresses the limitations of the study, offers potential future research paths, and discusses the implications of the amendments to Law #5199 on Turkey's street animal population.

Together, these chapters employ a combination of computational and qualitative methods to trace the emergence, amplification, and institutionalization of Turkey's anti-street dog movement. This mixed-methods approach allows for both empirical depth through social media analysis, discourse tracking, and theoretical engagement with broader questions in political sociology, alt-right movements, and HAS/CAS literatures. By triangulating data sources, the study aims to offer a holistic account of how a once-fringe alt-right discourse gained political traction and reshaped national policy toward street animals through key political mechanisms without popular support.

CHAPTER 2

THE ABSENCE OF STREET ANIMALS IN CRITICAL ANIMAL STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP

The non-human turn in the social sciences, emerging in the late 70's gaining more momentum towards the 21st century, has brought together a multidisciplinary band of scholars concerned with approaching the non-human animal as subjects of social life rather than static beings. Critical Animal Studies (CAS) was founded on a research agenda that emphasizes scrutinizing the foundational assumptions regarding non-human animals and a more direct political commitment to the animal rights movement. It is on these grounds that it has distanced itself from the broader Human-Animal Studies field (HAS). However, much like the broader HAS field, CAS remains ignorant of the existence of large populations of street animals cohabiting urban environments with humans, and inevitably ends up reproducing what can be called Western conceptualizations of the non-human, which it takes for granted. As a prelude to the analysis of the anti-street dog movement in Turkey, this chapter highlights and criticizes the absence of street animals not only in the wider Human-Animal Studies (HAS) but also in Critical Animal Studies (CAS) scholarship and then reviews the limited literature addressing this gap. Doing so, this chapter contributes to the CAS literature by making an agenda-setting intervention in the field.

2.1. Locating the animal in the social

Laying the foundations for the academic investigation of animals in social sciences is often credited to the seminal books of philosophers Peter Singer (1977) and Tom

Regan (1983). Emphasizing that non-human animals also have the capability to feel pain, Singer's (1977) *Animal Liberation* argues that all animate beings who are capable of suffering should have the right to have their interests be held in equal consideration to other species, including humans, regardless of their level of intelligence. Singer (1977) calls acting against this principle speciesism, which he sees to be morally on par with discriminating against humans based on their skin color. Regan's (1983) *The Case for Animal Rights*, on the other hand, argues against the philosophical views denying non-human animals social rights. The said works are considered among the founding texts of animal rights theory today (Shapiro & DeMello, 2010; Holmberg, 2011). As sociologists and psychologists joined philosophers in studying non-human animals as a part of the social, Human-Animal Studies (HAS, sometimes also referred to as Animal Studies [AS]) emerged as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, whose scope was later further expanded with the participation of anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, and legal scholars (Shapiro & DeMello, 2010).

The perceived shortcomings and the political complacency of HAS scholarship have led some scholars to label themselves under the term Critical Animal Studies (CAS), emphasizing their politically-engaged and socially critical positionality (Shapiro & DeMello, 2010; Taylor & Twine, 2014a). HAS pioneers Shapiro & DeMello (2010, p. 311) note that CAS is "unapologetically liberationist and allies with abolitionist and radical elements of the animal protection movement," adding that "in an era of center-right politics in the United States and hypersensitivity to radical ideas and direct action, CAS could have a negative impact on public perception both of the movement, and, by association, of HAS." On the CAS front, Taylor & Twine (2014a) highlight that CAS seeks to differentiate itself

from “the broader AS field” by directly focusing on challenging anthropomorphic and even instrumentalist foundational assumptions towards non-human animals. While HAS scholars also renounce speciesism and argue for animal rights, CAS maintains that HAS scholarship has not been able to overcome the anthropocentric and instrumentalist assumptions that delegate non-human animals to human mastery. CAS also makes a point of concerning itself with the conditions of the non-human animals it studies. In a demonstration of the degree to which the political commitments of CAS scholars distinguish them from the members of the broader (H)AS field, Taylor & Twine (2014a) point out that even catering practices in (H)AS conferences lead to tensions between CAS scholars who regard the consumption of animal products at such events as “contradictory” and “disengaged” and other Animal Studies scholars. Similarly, in her criticism of prominent (H)AS scholar Donna Haraway, CAS scholar Zipporah Weisberg (2009) defines the “criticality” of CAS as “directly intervening” on behalf of the billions of non-humans animals subjected to systematic violence each year. However, the difference between being a CAS scholar and being a HAS scholar largely remains one of self-identification, and the two fields by no means have clear-cut boundaries separating one from the other (Taylor & Twine, 2014a).

Nevertheless, neither HAS nor CAS scholars have paid considerable attention to stray domestic animals despite the latter’s politically invested position and self-claimed cynicism of the foundational assumptions about animals. While CAS scholars have stressed the precarious living conditions of dogs and cats as companion animals and the affective labor associated with their living conditions, they largely remain oblivious to the existence of permanent, free-ranging populations of homeless domestic animals. Moreover, discussions of violence against non-human

animals in HAS and CAS alike mostly revolve around what is conventionally called "industry animals," i.e., non-human animals who perform physical labor for humans and those who are consumed by humans, taking the relative safety of domestic feline and canine lives for granted as putative companion animals (e.g., Cole & Morgan, 2011; Cook, 2015; Twine & Taylor, 2014b, Scanes & Toukhsati, 2017). Even when they acknowledge the existence of stray "companion" animals in urban areas, this is treated as an anomaly or an outlier. For example, while Holmberg (2011) argues that cats and dogs are inseparable parts of urban life, social encounters between humans and dogs seem to be limited within the grounds of dog parks in her account. The possibility of free-roaming dogs is bound within the designated leash-free zones of the dog park. She only glances over the possibility of so-called companion animals existing without being a pet in the urban environment, also noting that people may consider those domestic animals pests if they exceed "certain limits."

Such universalization of certain domestic non-human animal species' existence as companion animals or "pets" is arguably a result of the European and Northern American foundations of both HAS and CAS and reflects an epistemological blindspot in the scholarship[2]. Arguably, this lacuna directly stems from the historical eradication of free-ranging domestic animal populations in many Western countries, either through animal welfare campaigns aimed at achieving animal birth control and taking care of homeless pets as Sternheim (2012) argues was the case for the Netherlands, or through the orchestrated efforts of local and central authorities to cull the street animal population which they deemed unwanted for various reasons as it was the case for United Kingdom, United States and Italy (Howell, 2019; Levi, 2019; Srinivasan, 2012; Wells, 2019).

[2] For a rare instance of a scholar pointing this out, see Fortuny (2014, p.274).

However, sizable free-ranging domestic animal populations do exist in many countries like Romania (Papavasili et al. 2022; Pencea & Brădățan, 2015), Turkey (Fortuny, 2014; Haspolat, 2019), and India (Srinivasan, 2012; Srinivasan, 2019), although their legal status and tthe social attitudes against them animals may vary. In the next section of this chapter, I will thus delve into the limited studies filling this gap in the mainstream HAS/CAS scholarship and then establish the historical context of street animals in Turkey.

2.2 Locating the street animal: attestations from Turkey and the world

The limited literature that directly addresses the existence of numerous permanent street animal populations and their existence in urban settings, mostly focuses on street dogs and is produced by scholars from the Global South. Although articles addressing "stray" animals all over the globe can be found in Animal Studies journals, they are mostly focused on animal birth control and stray management policies and approach the issue from a problem-solving perspective (e.g., Levi, 2019; Natoli et al., 2019; Papavasili et al., 2022; Pencea & Brădățan, 2015). Studies and investigations into the living conditions of ownerless domestic animals, the politics of their existence and the contestations surrounding it, and practices of caring for those animals without aiming to bind their livelihoods to human ownership remain largely absent.

A likely explanation for this is, as discussed in the previous section, that Western scholarship has largely been (and is) unaware of the possibility of sizable stray domestic animal populations existing in urban settings or has made assumptions that preclude such a possibility. In this section, I will explore the limited literature addressing street animals and then construct a brief account of the Turkish

street animal. I will then conclude the chapter with a call for CAS scholars everywhere to start paying more attention to street animals before continuing with the computational leg of the study in the next chapter.

2.2.1 Enter the street animal

Indian geographer Krithika Srinivasan (2012), whose body of work has contributed to the lacuna of street animals in the CAS scholarship greatly, compares the dog control legislations of India and the United Kingdom - two countries with and without sizable street dog populations, respectively. Here, Srinivasan (2012) reports that a 1906 law made the British police responsible for seizing stray dogs, and disposing of them if they are not claimed within a week. Later environmental legislation from 1990 and 2005, in turn, overrode the 1906 law ordering the police to massacre stray dogs but "empowered local authorities to identify and seize stray dogs" in order for them to be "sold, given away, sent to a re-homing center, or euthanized" at authorities' disposal if they are not claimed within a week (Srinivasan, 2012; p. 4). Dog control practices existed in India in the forms of mass-massacring stray dogs with poison or electrocution in unorchestrated local campaigns from their introduction by the British during the colonial period to the banning of such practices in 2001 and replacing them with animal birth control (ABC) campaigns enforced on a federal level. The 2001 legislation introducing ABC practices also categorized dogs into two categories: pet dogs, which are considered properties under the responsibility of their humans much like those in the UK, and street dogs. Srinivasan (2012) points out that the legislation's use of *street* dogs instead of *stray* dogs implies a legitimization of the dog's existence on the street, in

contrast to the sense of "being out of place" the term *stray* connotes. Srinivasan (2012, p. 11) concludes:

> In India, the legal sanction given to dogs on the street supports opportunities for dog life that are not available in Britain. This, then, is a form of interspecies cohabitation in which dogs that are not caught up in either 'economies of affection' (Haraway 2003, 38) or economies of utility live alongside humans who might love, revile, fear or be indifferent to them. In this kind of 'living with', animal autonomy does not necessarily imply spatial separation or wildness. At the same time, animal (well)being is not contingent on direct human love and care. (...) Such a living with 'harbours no pretence of utopian perfection' (Acampora 2004, 230). Indian street dogs struggle for food and shelter, get run over by automobiles, and are victims of accidental and intentional human cruelty. In turn, they pose threats to human safety and aesthetics, with rabies, mauling and dog faeces being just a few examples. But ownerless dogs are allowed to live, nonetheless, as 'street dogs', rather than being killed as 'stray dogs'.

When the ownerless dogs Srinivasan (2012) talks about are allowed to live but their right to exist in the city is not recognized, Development Studies scholar Yamini Narayanan (2017) argues that their life is "colonized" through policies built upon the biopolitics of human superiority. According to Narayanan (2017), free-ranging domestic animals such as street dogs and cats, as well as birds, are colonized in urban settings through the socio-political construction of the human-animal binary, which simultaneously "denies the animality of humans and the personhood of animals." This exclusion of animal rights from urban governance results from a type of biopolitics and informality, the latter understood as the practice of being left out of formal urban planning and ascribed to a precarious existence without formal recognition or protection. Narayanan (2017) argues that the colonization of urban non-human life and the ascription of urban non-human animals into informality co-produce an Agambenian "state of exception" for non-human animals, where animals are exceptionalized as not-persons, and humans as not-animals, privileging human claims on land through human-expceptionalist justifications. Animals and their existence on urban territory are thus rendered exceptional to the politics of

recognition and rights that are normative for humans. Additionally, urbanization-as-development intensifies the marginalization and eviction of animals from urban habitats. They are increasingly evicted from spaces that are privatized, developed, or otherwise removed from non-human access as non-urban environments become urbanized. This process is further complicated by the rapid urbanization in heavily populous regions of the Global South, where street animals face eviction and even culling as they are thought in the way of urbanization. Narayanan (2017) also highlights the impact of Western-style urban planning on eliminating "ferals," which legitimizes and naturalizes violence against street animals by framing them as encroachers and pests.

Anthropologist Gizem Haspolat's (2019) work on Turkey provides insight into the cohabitation and care practices with humans and urban non-human animals who are informalized in the sense Narayanan (2017) appropriates the term. Haspolat (2019, p. 80-85) sheds light on Istanbul's animal care volunteers, people who individually or organizedly participate in voluntary care labor for the city's street animal population. The care practices of these volunteers typically involve distributing food for the street animals in their vicinities and being on alert for injured or sick animals they may come across or hear about. Volunteers often have to cover street animals' food and medical expenses on their own finances, and they try to alleviate the financial strains of caring for street animals through strategies like finding veterinary practitioners who are willing to take in street animals at reduced prices. Haspolat (2019) points out that burdening oneself with the care of street animals in one's daily life, which is often tolling not only emotionally but also financially and physically, contradicts prevalent notions of living a "good life." Despite this, Haspolat (2019) argues that the "weight of witnessing" the lives of

street animals and the challenges they face motivates volunteers to continue caring for them.

Having mentioned these works, I will now reconstruct a short account of Turkey's street animals, as one of the main goals of this chapter is to make the existence of street animals more visible in the wider HAS/CAS literature.

2.2.2 A brief history of Turkey's street animals

The existence of sizable unowned domestic animal populations in Turkey, both in urban and rural areas, is a long-standing and historically well-documented notion. The best-attested case of street animals cohabiting urban spaces with humans in Turkey is that of Istanbul, although the existence of street animals permeates every urban settlement of the country. Archaeological evidence indicates that free-roaming dogs were present in the historical peninsula of today's Istanbul at least as early as the 4th century A.D. (Onar et al., 2012). These "uncherished" dogs of the Byzantine capital roamed Constantinople's streets and busy harbors well before the city's fall to the Ottomans in the 15th century. The free-roaming dog population the new Ottoman capital inherited from the Byzantine period continued to be a central part of Istanbul's urban life (Gündoğdu, 2018; Haspolat, 2019). The cohabitation of Istanbul's human residents with street animals, both cats and dogs, was sometimes a source of cultural shock to foreign eyes from the West (Dubino, 2014; Gündoğdu, 2023).

However, as Gündoğdu (2018) reports, street cats were often targeted in campaigns against pandemics as they were seen to be carriers of pestilence and illness, while Ottoman authorities and Istanbul's elite increasingly began to see the street dog population of the Empire's capital city as a security and welfare problem

in the 19th century. Gündoğdu (2018) contends that street dogs were among the first casualties of the Ottoman state's modernization efforts. Beginning with the reign of the renowned reformer Mahmud II (1808-1839) and continuing until the Empire's collapse, the Ottoman state systematically deported street dogs to remote areas outside of Istanbul's city center, where they would succumb to hunger, thirst, or exposure. This was seen as a practical measure to address what the modernizing ruling elite viewed as one of the country's longstanding and pressing issues. Moreover, many were pleased to see the government making an attempt to "normalize" the urban scenery of Istanbul, making it more closely resemble those in the West (Fortuny, 2014; p. 280).

Gündoğdu (2018) argues that the modernizing Ottoman state pursued a long-term and nuanced strategy to render the street dogs beneficial to the expectations of modern state institutions and humans. The modern state targeted the existence of unattended dogs in public places by portraying them as vectors of disease and sources of disorder, which helped legitimize state-led eradication campaigns. Gündoğdu (2018, 2023) contends that the modernist vision embraced by the reformist elite imagined dogs in various roles and capacities that fit human services, such as rendering them police dogs or pet animals. The modernizing Ottoman state, then, aimed to render dogs from being "unruly subjects" on the streets to "servile friends" of its subjects, as Gündoğdu (2018) puts it.

What can be called anti-street dog sentiment amongst the residents of Istanbul arguably peaked during the Young Turk Period (1908-1918). Historian Palmira Brummett (1995) demonstrates that street dogs were a recurring theme in the satirical publications that appeared during the approximately two years ensuing the Young Turk Revolution, when freedom of the press proliferated in the Empire.

Along with cholera and local women's increasing subscription to Western fashion standards, street dogs were portrayed as an epitome of the Empire's pressing problems. The post-Young Turk revolution Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government was expected and encouraged to solve these problems, of which the existence of street dogs was seen as the one that was most controllable by human intervention (Brummett, 1995; Gündoğdu, 2018). Amidst public debates regarding what should be done, and trying to minimize potential public backlash, the CUP administration eventually decided to mass deport the urban street dog population to Oxia (today known in Turkish as Hayırsızada, "wicked island"), a small, rocky isle in the Princes' Islands. Hayırsızada became a death camp for some 80,000 Istanbul dogs who eventually perished of hunger and thirst or ended up cannibalizing each other (Gündoğdu, 2018; Haspolat, 2019).

Turkish street dogs (and to a lesser degree, cats) continued to be subjected to unorchestrated eradication campaigns, which local governments conducted without legal repercussions until 2004, when the Turkish Parliament passed Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals, which would be overturned by the same party that sponsored it in July 2024. Besides banning such practices, the 2004 law also stipulated that local governments apply ABC procedures on their local street animal population without forcibly relocating them. However, the law was never strongly enforced, and atrocities against street animals continued to be committed by the hands of municipalities, often with little to no repercussions (see HayKonFed, n.d -a; Haspolat, 2019).

Writing on the place of the street dog population in contemporary Istanbul, Kim Fortuny (2014) observes that the Istanbul Street dog exists ambiguously on the

edges of being domestic pet animals and wild beings. Fortuny (2014, p. 272) writes about the street dogs of Istanbul:

> He or she vies for food and space with other inhabitants of the streets: cats, nocturnal rats, various scavenger birds, the urban derelict, members of the poor. If a dog is most often defined by his use-value to man - a guardian of property, a herder of livestock, a hunter of game and illegal substances, a status symbol, a pet - the Istanbul Street dog, serving no clear or tangible purpose to the modern man, lacks a concrete definition. Roaming outside and beyond the traditional lexicons and taxonomies of civilized society, the feral dog belongs to another place and another time. (...) American-born residents of Istanbul, like me, struggle to make room for him in our own frames of reference. Local people do not agree on his status. He is at times rounded up and "disappeared", but just as often fed and talked to. He is an enigma, and like all enigmas, he must endure various forms of affection and abuse…

As we are once again witnessing the establishment of this so-called enigmatic canine presence in the streets as a security concern threatening the (human) society in Turkey while the country is simultaneously being branded on social media as a realm where street cats rule, the urgency of Critical Animal Studies scholars to turn their attention to the living conditions of street animals and the politics surrounding their existence becomes only more apparent. It is on this note that I will now conclude this chapter.

2.3. In lieu of a conclusion: a call to a new agenda for Critical Animal Studies

Through this chapter, I have pointed out a lacuna in CAS regarding the existence of populations of free-roaming (or, if you will, homeless) domestic animals and discussed highlights from the small yet significant literature ameliorating this gap before going on to construct a brief account of Turkey's street animals. Although the literature is growing and has seen important contributions in this vein in recent years, Western mainstream CAS scholarship remains unaware of the existence of vast numbers of street animals sharing urban spaces with humans. This, ironically yet inevitably, leads to a reinforcement of Western ideas and assumptions about the

relationship between humans and non-human animals, namely those that are considered pets or companion animals, in the CAS literature.

This chapter, therefore, aims to be a call for scholars who align themselves with Critical Animal Studies, located in the West or otherwise, to produce more knowledge about these large numbers of homeless domestic animals who live, for better or worse, without human guardianship or companionship - and lack the protections those relationships may provide. If Critical Animal Studies is to live up to its claims of scrutinizing the foundational assumptions regarding non-human animals and "directly intervening" (Weisberg, 2009) on behalf of the non-human animals who suffer in human hands, it is past due that it becomes aware of street animals. In line with this chapter's call, Chapter 3 analyzes how street dogs are established as threats within Turkey's anti-street dog movement, as well as the movement's online origins and its participant profile.

CHAPTER 3

THE ALT-RIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ANTI-STREET DOG MOVEMENT

The previous chapter outlined a history of the inclusion of animals as a subject in social sciences, leading to the establishment of Human Animal Studies (HAS) and its branch Critical Animal Studies (CAS) as interdisciplinary academic fields. Following a brief account of Turkey's street animals, the previous chapter pointed out the gap in HAS/CAS regarding street animals, who cohabit human residential environments without living under the guardianship of specific humans. In line with the previous chapter's call for the researchers associating themselves with HAS/CAS to produce knowledge about street animals and the everyday politics surrounding their contested and precarious livelihoods, this chapter will analyze the online origins of Turkey's anti-street dog movement through a mixed-methods approach using Twitter/X data. The chapter will argue that the Turkish anti-street dog movement, emerging as a muted online discourse and gaining traction following key events and possible artificial amplification efforts, can be classified as an alt-right movement.

This chapter analyzes Twitter/X data in triangulation with sources from conventional media outlets and Google Trends to establish a timeline of the anti-street dog movement. Then, the chapter analyzes the movement's Twitter/X presence in terms of the participants' gender as well as the repetitiveness in posts relating to the movement to assess plausibility of artificial amplification of the movement's social media presence. Following a frequency analysis of tweets with anti-street dog keywords, the other posts of these tweets' authors are further

subjected to frequency analysis to establish the broader ideological context of the anti-street dog movement. Finally, the chapter will set the stage for the next part of the study, which explores the process starting with the far-right's co-optation of the alt-right anti-street dog discourse in the lead-up to Turkey's 2024 local elections.

In what follows, I first situate the alt-right as an online phenomenon, building on the overview given in the Introduction chapter. I then provide an overview of Twitter/X as a social scientific research medium. I then continue with laying out the data and methodology used in this chapter before presenting the empirical findings relating to the movement's temporal breakdown, gendered characteristics, the signs of its artificial amplification, and the broader discursive repertoire of its followers. In the final section, I argue that these elements collectively reveal an alt-right characteristic in Turkey's anti-street dog movement.

3.1 Analyzing the alt-right as an online phenomenon

As a political and social phenomenon, the conception and dissemination of the alt-right has been marked by the prevalence of digital communication and social media (Hawley, 2019; Miller-Idriss, 2020). The early alt-right began to coalesce around US-based political blogs of the late 2000s and early 2010s in the golden age of blogging, later moving to decentralized, pseudo-anonymous social media platforms (i.e., social media platforms in which users are not required to disclose their real-word identities and are encouraged to hide behind a persona) like Reddit and 4chan and podcasts. Later, as algorithm-heavy social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and later TikTok became more popular and kept refining their algorithms, they increasingly promoted incendiary and controversial content to maximize user interaction and to keep users coming back to their platforms. Such

content includes but is not limited to those who involve hate and attack towards political personalities, ideologies, or groups; or specific social groups in society (Anderson & Wood, 2020; DISA, 2024; Kuncoro et al., 2024; Rathje, van Bavel, & van der Linden, 2021). Consequently, speaking points associated with the alt-right increasingly gained visibility on users' social media feeds. However, the alt-right did not gain mainstream recognition in conventional media coverage and political commentary until August 2017's Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which then also came to be known as Charlottesville Riots (Miller-Idriss, 2020). Originally planned through alt-right online spheres as a rally to demonstrate opposition to the removal of a Confederate monument, the event turned violent after white nationalist groups in the rally and counter-protesters clashed. The rising visibility of alt-right content on social media and its real-life consequences has also increased social scientists' interest in analyzing social media platforms as mediums for alt-right political discourse. The alt-right's online discourse coalesced around the rejection of multiculturalism and egalitarian political philosophies, a disdain for establishment conservatives, and the vanguarding of the existing social order in the face of progressivism (Hawley, 2019; Miller-Idriss, 2020).

In the next section, I will review the specific qualities of Twitter/X as a social media platform and elaborate on its potential as a medium of analysis in social sciences research before I move on to the description of the chapter's data and methodology.

3.2 Twitter/X as a medium of analysis

Although social media platforms like Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, and in the Turkish case, Ekşisözlük, also hold an important place in the dissemination and

legitimization of alt-right discourse, this chapter will focus on Twitter, or as currently known, X. Established in 2006 as a microblogging website, Twitter was officially renamed X by Elon Musk, who controversially bought the platform in late 2022.

As a microblogging-based social media platform, Twitter/X initially allowed users to post 140-characters long text-based content and engage with other users' posts through medium-specific mechanisms like favoriting (later renamed liking) and reposting ("retweeting") them. The character limit was later raised to 280 for everyone, and following Musk's introduction of a paid-tier membership, unlimited characters for paying users. The platform allows users to quote other's posts and reply directly to them, and users can attach up to four images or one video to a single post, giving Twitter/X content a multimodal angle without displacing the centrality of text-based content. A characteristic feature of Twitter/X is its use of hashtags, metadata tags marked with a hash symbol (#), which other social media platforms adapted following Twitter/X. Each hashtag acts as a hyperlink through which the user can access other posts that include the same hashtag upon clicking. The site publicly traces the most popular hashtags as well as repeated topics users are posting about at a given moment, locally and globally. Twitter/X allows users to control their level of anonymity as users can use their real identity, create a Twitter/X persona, or combine aspects of both by choosing what to share as a part of their profile components like profile picture, user biography, and public display name.

As Twitter/X gained global popularity, public figures, including politicians and high-ranking bureaucrats, increasingly began using Twitter/X to communicate with the public. This, in combination with Twitter's role alongside Facebook in the 2011 Arab Spring and Turkey's 2013 Gezi Park protests led not only political and

cultural commentators but also social scientists to call Twitter/X a “digital public sphere” or “digital town hall” (Tüfekçi, 2017). This label often denoted an optimistic sentiment that the microblogging site was a non-hierarchical outlet in which every user could participate in public conversations, facilitating social and political engagement and creating a possibility for a digitally enabled participatory democracy (e.g.; Castells, 2008). However, with the rise of the alt-right, the social-media based foreign interference and false news controversies surrounding U.S. presidential elections since 2016 (Kovalčíková & Spatafora, 2024), and especially following Musk’s purchase of Twitter/X – who himself has described the platform as a town hall (Musk, 2022) – this optimistic perspective shifted toward recognition of Twitter/X as an algorithmically-driven, pseudo-pluralistic platform often used by political actors for agenda-setting and discourse control (Benkler et al., 2018; Conway-Silva et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2016).

While how Twitter/X’s algorithm functions is not made public, Falkenberg et al. (2024) have demonstrated that the platform incentivizes in-group oriented political content rather than out-group oriented political content. On the other hand, they revealed that out-group oriented political content tends to be more toxic than in-group Twitter/X interactions. Extending on social psychological models, Falkenberg et al. (2024) argue that the bias towards homophily the Twitter/X algorithm demonstrates can create political echo bubbles and exacerbate existing political polarization. This is augmented by their finding that partisan non-conformists are regarded as members of ideological opponents by political communities. On another note, among the 9 countries and 7 languages whose Twitter/X communities were analyzed, Turkish political tweet networks were found to be the most polarized amongst the left-right divide.

Sociologists and political scientists have analyzed Twitter/X using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods for various ends. A prevalent theme in social scientific studies analyzing Twitter/X data is tracing social movements and investigating how hashtags, retweets, and follower networks amplify, structure, and sustain political mobilization. Twitter/X's textual and metadata richness allows researchers to conduct sentiment analysis, discourse analysis, network analysis, and temporal mapping of political and social phenomena (Bennet, 2022; Janetzko, 2022).

Multiple factors determined the centering of Twitter/X as the locus of this study. Firstly, and most importantly, Twitter/X's textual emphasis and metadata access significantly facilitates the chronological tracing of discourse and events, as its platform structure inherently captures temporal sequences clearly through timestamps, thread structures, and hashtag dynamics. This is an asset for tracing how participation in and discourse surrounding social movements like the anti-street dog movement take shape, especially in Turkey, which boosted the world's 5th largest Twitter user base as of 2021 (Elmas et al., 2021). Moreover, unlike visually oriented social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok, Twitter/X offers structured textual data that can be systematically collected and analyzed at scale using computational methods. Social media platforms designed around visual content remain methodologically challenging for chronological analyses, as current technological capabilities for processing and analyzing visual media on a large scale remain limited, requiring extensive manual coding and annotation.

Prior scholarship has thus shown that Twitter/X holds a privileged position in relaying alt-right discourse to diverse audiences. Its platform dynamics, including algorithmic promotion of controversial and emotionally charged content, rapid dissemination capabilities, and ease of interaction among users and public figures,

make it particularly effective for the spread and normalization of alt-right talking points. Following this overview of Twitter/X as a social media platform and a medium of social scientific research, I will now lay out the methodological approach of the chapter in the next section.

3.3 Methodology and data

Due to the monetization of Twitter/X's API access and the absence of university funds to support this study, the social media data analyzed in this chapter was generously granted by Koç University's POLITUS Project. Organized under Koç University's Center for Computational Social Sciences, the POLITUS project aims to assess the commercial viability of proprietary natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML) technologies for AI-based, data-driven, and fair policymaking (Koç University Center for Computational Social Sciences, n.d). As of April 2025, when the data used in this study was compiled by the project, The POLITUS Corpus consisted of more than 718 million Turkish tweets from approximately 6.6 million users.

As a starting point in analyzing the movement, a timeline of the anti-street dog movement was constructed by triangulating Twitter/X data with data obtained from Google Trends and conventional media. According to the CSV[3] report obtained from Google Trends comparing the searches in Turkey for the terms *başıboş köpek* ('stray dog'), *başıboş köpek sorunu* ('stray dog problem'), and *sokak köpeği* ('street dog') in the period between 01.01.2004 (the date the Google Trends service became active) and 30.07.2024 (the exact date the amendments to Law #5199 were accepted

[3] A CSV (Comma-Separated Values) file is a table format based on plain text, in which each line represents a record separated by commas. CSV files are highly popular in data science as they are lightweight, easily readable, and compatible with almost every data platform.

in the Turkish Parliament), the term *başıboş köpek* (‘stray dog’) first appears in Google queries conducted in Turkey in November 2013, then again in June 2015, after which it disappears until October 2019. The term only began to appear regularly and without intermittence in search trends in December 2021, when a toddler was reportedly mauled by a dog in Gaziantep. The incident prompted President Erdoğan to make a speech in which he incensively called for “the White Turks to get a hold of their dogs” (BBC Türkçe, 2021), and more importantly, for municipalities to take the “appropriate steps” to remove ownerless animals from the streets – which would be illegal for the municipalities to do so under Turkey’s animal protection law sponsored by Erdoğan’s party AKP in 2004 (Konda Araştırma & Danışmanlık, 2024b; also see Chapter 4). Moreover, December 2021 also saw a Turkish Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry circular banning the importing and breeding of certain dog breeds, as well as limiting where they can be taken out in public (Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı Doğa Koruma ve Milli Parklar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2021). Likewise, Twitter/X data suggests that anti-street dog keywords did not appear until early 2019 and gained traction only after December 2021, consistent with Google Trends data. Nevertheless, the term *başıboş köpek sorunu* (‘stray dog problem’) itself does not appear in the data until February 2021.

For the purposes of this study, the appearance of the term *başıboş köpek* (‘stray dog’) in November 2013 and June 2015 as apparent in Google Trends data will be discarded as anomalies since they remain isolated, non-sustained cases and no connection could be found with their appearance with the public discourse at their respective timeframes. Accordingly, a timeline of the anti-street dog movement was constructed as follows:

Table 1. The Timeline of the Turkish Anti-Street Dog Movement

Date	Event
1 October 2019	Sustained and consecutive Google searches for *başıboş köpek* (‘stray dog’) begin; anti-street dog accounts become active on Twitter/X.
9 & 25 December 2021	President Erdoğan's first anti-street dog speech following the Gaziantep incident, calling for municipalities to remove ownerless animals from the streets in breach of the existing law. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry circular on “Animals Posing Danger.” Posts with anti-street dog keywords noticeably increase in frequency on Twitter/X.
1 September 2023	Campaigning begins for Turkey’s 31 March 2024 local elections, marked by intensified political politicization surrounding street dogs.
1 April 2024	Conclusion of 31 March 2024 local elections, notable for significant electoral losses suffered by the ruling AKP to marginal right-wing parties co-opting anti-street dog rhetoric.
30 July 2024	Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals is amended in line with anti-street dog movement’s demands

As I only had access to a subset of the POLITUS corpus extracted through a predefined set of keywords, independent exploratory analysis across the full corpus was not possible. Data collection was performed by the researchers at Koç University’s POLITUS project using a predefined set of keywords I designed to trace anti-street dog discourse within the project’s Turkish Twitter/X corpus. The selected terms and their significance are listed below:

Table 2. List of Terms Used to Gather Twitter/X Data

Term	Value	Translation	Note
başıboş köpek/ler	Negative	'stray dog/s'	Anti-street dog movement's rhetorical innovation to delegitimize street dogs
başıboş köpek sorunu	Negative	'stray dog problem'	Core framing used by the anti-street dog movement
köpek terörü	Negative	'dog terror'	Sensationalist phrase employed by anti-street dog movement
sokak köpeği/köpekleri	Neutral	'street dog/dogs'	Neutral, conventional Turkish term
mama lobisi	Negative	'kibble lobby'	Derogatory insinuation that animal rights activists and caretakers do so to exploit donations
itperest	Negative	'dog-worshipper'	Pejorative term targeting individuals opposing the anti-street dog movement

The terms listed in Table 2 returned a total of 297,116 posts from the corpus dated between 01/2010 and 01/2025, 165,357 (55.65%) of which explicitly contained the anti-street dog keywords. 292,328 (98.39%) of the overall results were posted after 01/2019. Likewise, 165,255 (99.9%) of the 165,357 posts containing negative keywords were posted after 01/2019. The ~55% to ~45% ratio of negative-to-neutral tweets suggest that anti-street dog sentiment was dominant in the platform over neutral-to-positive sentiments toward street dogs, yet not overwhelmingly so.

The lack of direct access to Twitter/X API and POLITUS corpus proved to be a limitation, rendering the cross-checking of the anonymized authors of the posts in the dataset across the corpus for triangulation or performing network analyses on the anti-street dog posts unfeasible. In the absence of such methodology, a random sample of 300,000 other posts from authors who had posted using anti-street dog keywords (i.e., excluding the value-neutral keyword *sokak köpeği/sokak köpekleri,* 'street dog/s') were compiled to perform frequency analysis.

3.4 Analysis

3.4.1 Temporal Analysis

A preliminary analysis using Google Trends data for the neutral term *sokak köpeği* 'street dog,' the anti-street dog framing *başıboş köpek* 'stray dog,' and *başıboş köpek sorunu* 'stray dog problem' between 01/01/2004 and 07/30/2024 (the exact date amendments to Law #5199 were accepted in the Turkish Parliament) suggested that anti-street dog keywords did not regularly appear in search inquiries until late 2019 and did not gain traction until December 2021. Figure 1 contains a chart provided by Google Trends for the frequency of these keywords.

Figure 1. Chart created using Google Trends on 30.07.2024. The “Note” label denotes changes that were made in Google’s tracking algorithm at the demarcated time. y-axis shows the relative popularity scores of respective terms over 100. Blue: "street dog", Red: "stray dog", Orange: "stray dog problem"

As shown in Figure 2, a temporal analysis of Twitter/X data for the negative terms listed in Table 2 shows that the frequency of the negative keywords rose and fell in unison. Notably, the tweets incorporating anti-street dog keywords made a sharp rise in 04/2023, possibly with the help of an astroturfing campaign (see Section 4.3). The definite peak of the negative terms’ popularity can be traced to 01/2024, in which the local election campaign increasingly saw minor far-right parties running on anti-street dog platforms (see Chapter 4). Posts using negative terminology for street dogs lose traction in the two months (02-03/2024) preceding the 31 March 2024 local elections, only to hit their second-highest peak in 06/2024, presumably due to the AKP’s announcement of their plans to amend Law #5199 in line with the anti-street dog movement’s demands (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2024 05 23;

also see Chapter 4). Following a sharp fall on 07/2024, tweet frequency again matches 06/2024 levels on 08/2024, after the amendments were passed in the parliament on July 30. Tweet frequency withers after the movement's agenda is officially adopted into law.

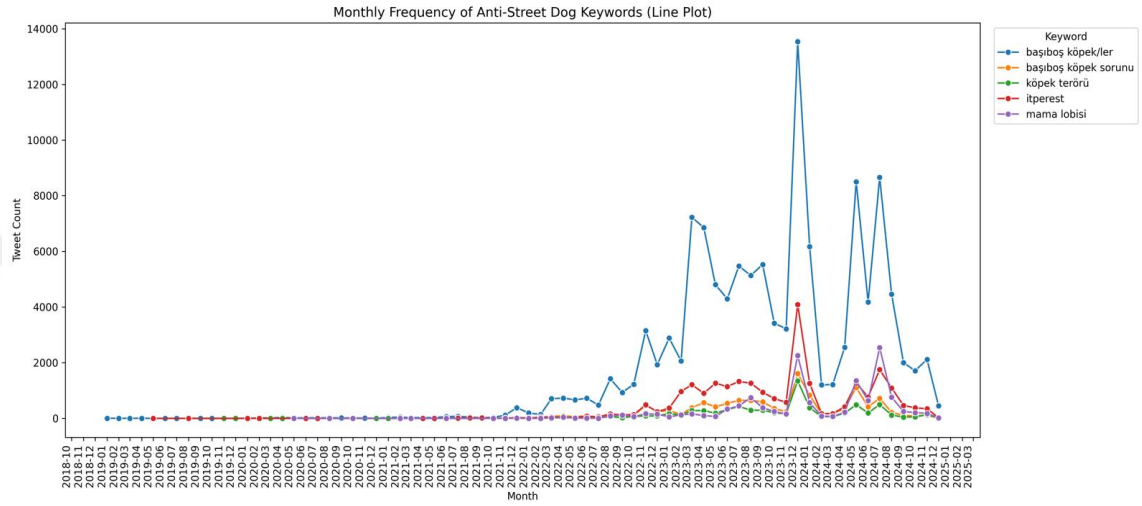

Figure 2. Line plot demonstrating the frequency trend of anti-street dog keywords in Twitter/X data between 01/2019 and 01/2025. Blue: "stray dog/s", Orange: "stray dog problem", Green: "dog terror", Red: "dog-worshipper", Purple: "kibble lobby"

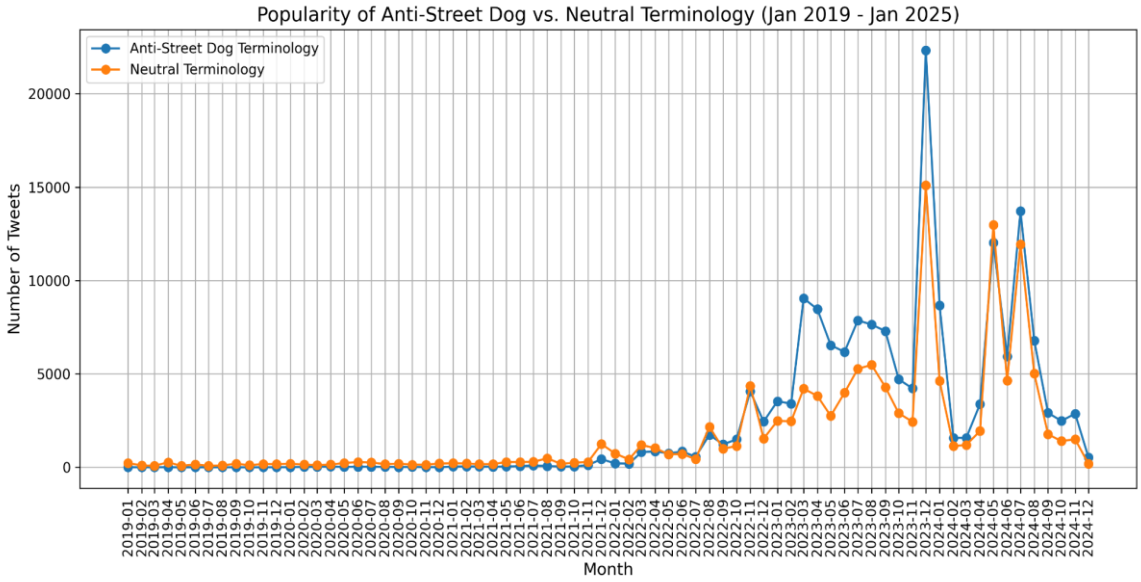

Figure 3: Line plot comparing the frequency trends of anti-street dog keywords with the neutral terms "sokak köpeği/köpekleri" (street dog/s)

3.4.2 Gender distribution

The gender distribution of individual users who provided their gender information in their profile settings demonstrate that the participants of both anti-street dog movement and the broader Twitter/X discourse around street dogs are overwhelmingly male (81.5% for negative keywords, 78.2% for all keywords). Figure 4 features the gender distribution of users posting with anti-street dog keywords while Figure 5 shows the gender distribution of those posting using neutral keywords:

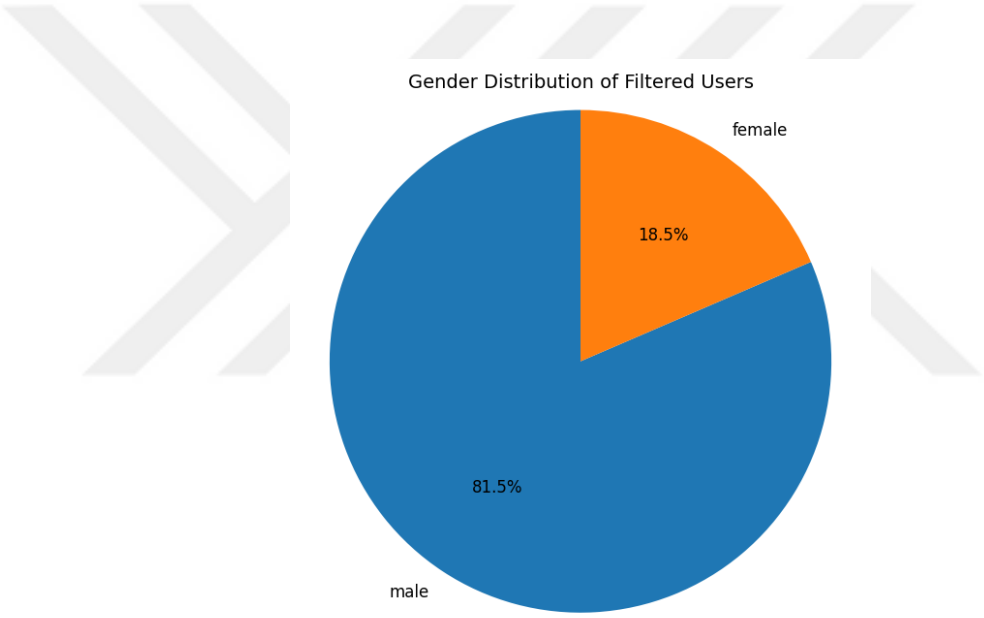

Figure 4. Pie chart showing the gender distribution of the authors of tweets with anti-street dog keywords

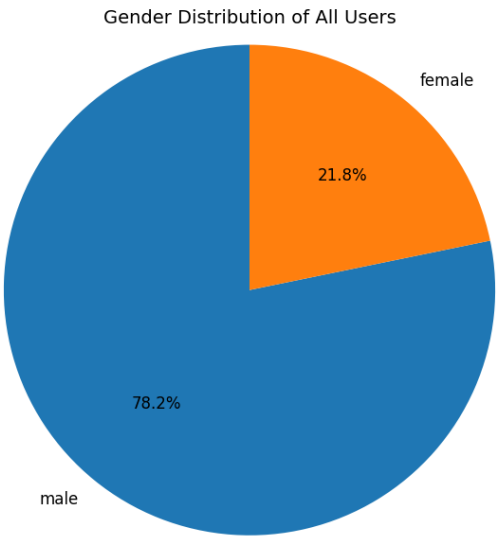

Figure 5. Pie chart showing the gender distribution of the authors of tweets using all keywords

While data from the POLITUS project indicates that Turkish Twitter/X users are already heavily skewed toward men, with an approximately 71% male to 29% female ratio, the gender imbalance within the anti-street dog discourse is even more pronounced. Male users are disproportionately represented not only in anti-street dog posts but also in the broader discussions on the platform surrounding street dogs. The platform's already unequal gender distribution, coupled with even greater male dominance in this specific discourse, demonstrates that the anti-street dog discourse on Twitter/X is a distinctly gendered one.

3.4.3 Authenticity and repetitiveness: evidence for astroturfing

Astroturfing is a type of political disinformation campaign aiming to manipulate public opinion, in which coordinated actors pretend to be ordinary citizens acting independently from any interest group or institution (Keller et al., 2020). In other words, astroturfing is "a manufactured top-down act that mimics bottom-up activity" to produce public consent as well as to mimic its existence (Kovic et al., 2018). On

Twitter/X, astroturfing campaigns may target elections or social movements through methods such as automated social media bots posting highly similar content as well as "content farming," in which individuals who often manage multiple semi-automated Twitter/X accounts are coordinated to produce and promote specific content (Uyheng & Carley, 2020).

In order to assess whether the anti-street dog discourse as well as the broader discussion around street dogs were artificially amplified, the Twitter/X data was analyzed using MinHash Locality-Sensitive Hashing (thereafter MinHash LSH) algorithm. MinHash LSH is a computationally efficient method that reliably analyzes text similarity. As cross-checking every token for repetition in a near-300,000 tweet dataset is a resource-intensive task for many personal computers, MinHash LSH samples trigram (three consecutive strings of words) similarity in texts and scales the result to approximate the Jaccard similarity score (i.e., the rate of shared constituents of two sets) of the items in the data. Previous studies have used a 0.7 (Shevtsov et al., 2022; McRae et al., 2022) or a stricter 0.8 (Pacheco et al., 2021; Jemelniak & Krempovych, 2021) Jaccard score threshold to successfully flag artificial amplification and coordinated manipulation efforts on Twitter/X (70% and 80% similarity, respectively). As the Jaccard score threshold is augmented, the MinHash LSH analysis increasingly returns highly repetitive and nearly identical content and further reduces the chance of flagging false positives.

For the purposes of the study, the data was separately analyzed using MinHash LSH with the similarity threshold set at 0.7 and a very conservative 0.85 Jaccard score to further reduce false positives. Table 3 contains the breakdown of the findings:

Table 3. Repetition Rates of Different Keyword Groups with J ≥ 0.7 and J ≥ 0.85 Thresholds. Standard deviations: 2.23% (J ≥ 0.7), 1.71% (J ≥ 0.85)

Keyword(s)	Percentage of repetitive posts for J ≥ 0.7	Percentage of repetitive posts for J ≥ 0.85
All keywords	22.35%	20.8%
Neutral keywords	25.38%	21.31%
Negative keywords	20.14%	18%
sokak köpeği 'street dog'	25.94%	22.44%
sokak köpekleri 'street dogs'	24.74%	20.49%
başıboş köpek 'stray dog'	22.8%	20.62%
başıboş köpekler 'stray dogs'	23.87%	21.7%
başıboş köpek sorunu 'stray dog problem'	20.13%	17.6%

As can be seen in Table 3, the MinHash LSH analysis returned an overall 22.35% repetition rate for J ≥ 0.7 and a 20.8% repetition rate for J ≥ 0.85 threshold across posts with all keywords. The overall repetition rate of the posts' negative keywords combined is 20.14% for J ≥ 0.7 and 18% for J ≥ 0.85. The highest repetition rate across both thresholds belongs to the neutral keywords *sokak köpeği* 'street dog' and *sokak köpekleri* 'street dogs', in the given order.

The findings indicate that nearly 1 in 4 to 5 posts across both thresholds were posted as a part of a coordinated agenda-building effort. The modest differences in the repetition rates between the J ≥ 0.7 and the stringent J ≥ 0.85 thresholds of

negative keywords (~2% for each inquiry) suggests that the repetitive patterns in this category hold against very high levels of scrutiny, whereas the higher rates of difference between the two thresholds for neutral terms (~3.5% to ~4%) imply social media campaigns against anti-street dog sentiment may have played a role in the high levels of repetition in tweets using neutral terms. The difference in repetition gaps (2% vs. 4%) was statistically significant ($z = 24.88$, $p < 0.0001$), reinforcing that negative keyword repetition is anomalously consistent – typical of artificial amplification. This indicates that a probable astroturfing effort using negative keywords was conducted by low-quality content repeaters like automated social media bots or paid content farming (Schoch et al., 2022).

For further examination, a temporal analysis of the distribution of authentic and repetitive tweets were conducted using the $J \geq 0.7$ threshold. Figure 6 and Figure 7 show the monthly distribution of repetitive and authentic tweets of the terms *başıboş köpekler* 'stray dogs' (23.87% repetition rate for $J \geq 0.7$) and *sokak köpekleri* 'street dogs' (24.74% repetition rate for $J \geq 0.7$). While the latter neutral term has a higher repetition rate, the temporal diffusion of repetitive tweets demonstrate that repetitive tweets overwhelmingly trail authentic tweets using the term – only slightly exceeding authentic tweets in 04/2023 (Figure 7). On the other hand, repetitive tweets posted using the anti-street dog framing *başıboş köpekler* 'street dogs' peak in the same month, surpassing authentic tweets approximately twofold[4]. The frequency of repetitive tweets using the term then sharply fell on 06/2023. This pattern of a sudden, concentrated rise in repetitive tweets followed by a sharp fall is strongly suggestive of targeted, artificial amplification (Figure 6). Since operating

[4] A relative rise in repetitive tweets using the neutral terms can also be observed in the same period (Figure 7). A possible explanation for this is that the anti-street dog also tweets using neutral terminology (see section 4.4).

astroturfing campaigns can be costly and computationally demanding, many astroturfing campaigns tone down in scale or end completely after infiltrating organic social media discourse (Schoch et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021). Authentic tweets using the negative term *başıboş köpekler* 'stray dogs' remain higher after the probable astroturfing campaign fades out in 06/2023 compared to their previous levels, except for the two months preceding the 2024 local elections (02-03/2024), implying that the probable campaign succeeded in gaining traction in grassroots discourse.

The higher rate of repetitiveness of the neutral *sokak köpekleri* 'street dogs' despite a lack of evidence for astroturfing efforts may be explained by social media co-tweeting and hashtag campaigns, which are conducted relatively often by animal rights interest groups, and not always directly against anti-street dog sentiment. Moreover, the neutral term *sokak köpekleri* 'street dogs' appears to generate significantly more authentic engagement overall, with peaks reaching nearly 10,000 tweets compared to about 6,000 for the negative term *başıboş köpekler* 'stray dogs'.

Therefore, while it should be noted that a MinHash LSH analysis is not sufficient to decisively establish astroturfing presence, the temporal spike in repetitive tweets and the statistically significant repetition gaps strongly suggest that there is a high probability of artificial amplification of tweets with anti-street dog sentiment in at least one instance.

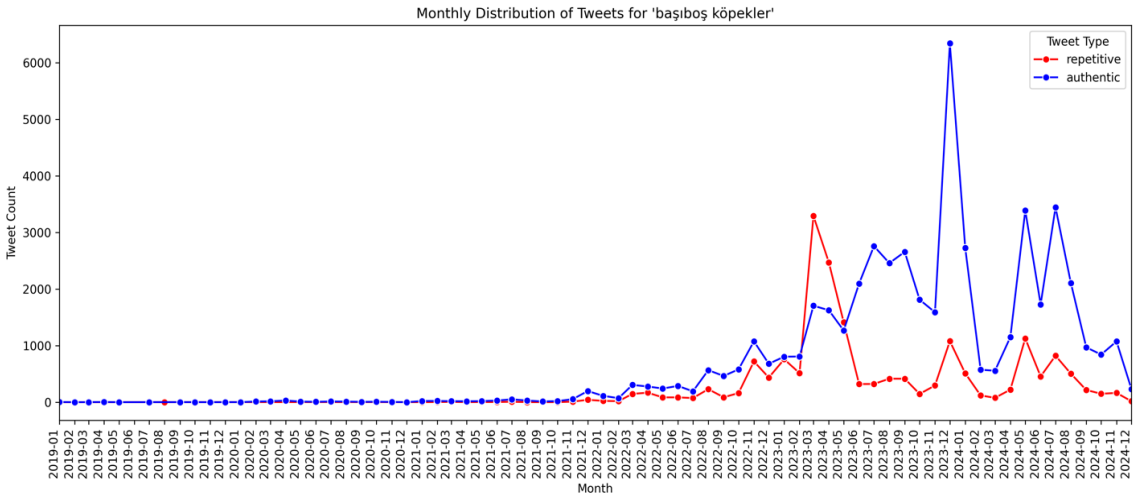

Figure 6. Monthly distribution of authentic and repetitive tweets using the term "stray dogs" ($J \geq 0.7$)

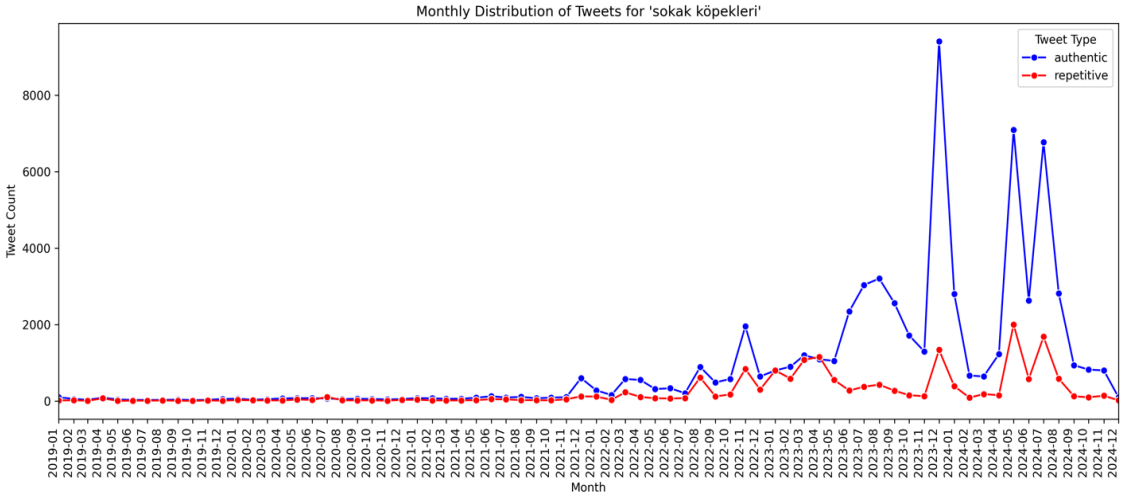

Figure 7. Monthly distribution of authentic and repetitive tweets using the neutral term "street dogs" ($J \geq 0.7$)

3.4.4 Frequency analysis

For this section of the study, tweets posted using anti-street dog keywords and the sample of other tweets posted by their authors were separately subjected to frequency analysis. To identify recurring linguistic patterns used to frame both the anti-street dog movement and the broader debate around street dogs, tweets containing negative keywords were analyzed for their most frequent unigrams (single-word units), bigrams (two-word units), trigrams (three-word units), and

tetragrams (four-word units). The same analysis was applied to the sampled tweets authored by users who had posted anti-street dog content. Although polygrams (units of two or more words) were also analyzed, their frequency results often overlapped with those of the bigrams. Therefore, polygram plots were excluded from the analysis.

Due to concerns of brevity, frequency tables repeating patterns of those presented here were omitted from the body of this thesis, and can be found in the appendix.

3.4.4.1 Phrases frequently used along anti-street dog terminology

The recurrence of phrases like *tek yol itlaf* ('the only way is culling') and *milli guvenlik sorunudur* ('is an issue of national security') in the trigram and tetragram plots demonstrates that the anti-street dog discourse repeatedly mobilizes the semantic repertoire of securitization (for an overview of Securitization Theory, see Introduction). These present emotionally and nationalistically charged, accessible signifiers (Balzacq, 2011) used to construct street dogs not only as an occasional nuisance (Fortuny, 2014) but as existential threat requiring immediate, exceptional intervention such as *itlaf*[5] 'culling'. The gender-skewed participation in anti-street dog discourse, with nearly 85% of posts authored by men, positions male Twitter/X users as the enabling audience whose recognition empowers securitizing actors to enact exceptional measures (Balzacq et al., 2016).

As Balzacq et al. (2016) suggest, securitizing interest groups develop specific practices and instruments for constructing threats. In the Turkish anti-street dog

[5] The use of *itlaf* 'culling' in this context is sometimes stylized by the movement as İTlaf, playing on the word *it* 'dog (deregatory)'.

discourse, this is articulated through not only the adoption of the delegitimizing innovation *başıboş köpek* 'stray dog,' but also the use of lexicon like *mama lobisi* 'kibble lobby' and *itperest* 'dog-worshipper', which delegitimize animal rights activism by reframing it as corrupt, irrationally fanatic, or even deranged (*ruh hastası* 'psychopath' in Figure 13). Some terms even go as far as labeling animal rights groups and pro-animal rights individuals as terrorists (*teror orgutu* 'terrorist organization', Figure 13), presumably borrowing from Turkey's political atmosphere, ripe with securitizing discourse (Adısönmez and Onursal, 2021). These terms not only define the opponents of the anti-street dog movement but also consolidate the movement participants' identity around shared values of public order and discipline.

A closer look at the dominant phrases across anti-street dog tweets reveals a recurring reliance on discursive tropes of child endangerment**,** biological threat**,** and nationalistic legitimacy – specifically, the symbolic invocation of children and rabies (*kuduz*), as well as appealing to Atatürk's edict ordering the culling of ownerless dogs in the Early Republican period (Figure 14, '*ataturkun itlaf emri resmi';* also see Chapter 4 for the use of this edict to legitimize contemporary culling by far-right parties). The child, in particular, serves as an object whose universally shared perception of vulnerability helps forge moral consensus and delegitimize dissent – mirroring common patterns in securitizing discourse where the notion of "the child" is positioned as untouchable (Doty, 1996). The invocation of child safety further establishes a false moral dilemma between the rights and safety of children and street animals. This false dilemma is also extended to a supposed antagonism between supporting animal rights and philanthropy, in the general sense of supporting human welfare (*insan düşmanı* 'anti-human', Figure 13).

Similarly, the trope of rabies – despite its near-nonexistence in contemporary Turkey (see Öztürk, 2022; Yıldırım & Çakmaklı, 2024) – appeals to an imaginary epidemic danger, biologizing the constructed threat and framing it as one of a public health emergency. Finally, the references to Atatürk perform a double securitizing function: they appeal to a moral center grounded in republican-nationalist ideology while implicitly delegitimizing opposing views as anti-national or insufficiently Kemalist.

Another striking pattern observed in anti-street dog tweets is the invocation of civilizational discourse (*dünyanın medeni ülkesinde,* "in a civilized country of the world", Figure 15; *avrupa ülkesinde sokakta köpek [yok],* "[there are no] dogs on streets in an European country", Figure 14). Appealing to Eurocentric, self-orientalizing tropes assert that a "civilized" country should not tolerate such scenes in its urban spaces echo Gündoğdu's (2018, 2023) account of the Late Ottoman civilizational anxieties about street dogs (see Chapter 2). This is also consistent with securitization theory's emphasis on symbolic repertoires (Balzacq et al., 2016), as the discursive threat posed by street dogs is embedded in broader anxieties about national image, discipline, and belonging. In a marriage of civilizational anxiety and calling for extreme measures, some phrases suggest the adoption of the "English application" (*olacak iyisi ingiliz uygulaması* 'will be rather the English application [sic]', Figure 14). This refers to the early 20th century British law foreseeing the killing of any unclaimed dogs, later relaxed but still in effect (Srinivasan, 2012; also see Chapter 2).

Moreover, anti-street dog actors frequently employ a language that portrays the members of the anti-street dog movement as the majority, while animal rights proponents are constructed as a deranged minority (the tetragrams with *[bir] avuç*

'handful', Figure 11). The recurrence of the tetragrams incorporating *[bir] avuç* 'handful' (Figure 11) is particularly revealing, as it functions to minimize and delegitimize dissenting voices by portraying them as unrepresentative of the public opinion, elitist, or ideologically extreme. The data used in this chapter suggests that, while tweets posted with anti-street dog keywords hold a ~10% majority over those tweeting with neutral keywords, public opinion remained highly opposed to the amendment of #5199 in line with anti-street dog demands (Konda Araştırma & Danışmanlık 2024b; also see Chapter 4). Beyond evidencing that social media visibility is not necessarily reflective of public opinion, this rhetorical move is emblematic of what Balzacq et al. (2016) describe as the "audience-building" function of securitization, in which securitizing actors attempt to generate collective assent not only by constructing a threat but by also consolidating their own legitimacy as speaking on behalf of "the people" – also typical of populist political rhetoric (Stavrakakis, 2014). By framing animal rights defenders as an out-of-touch minority, anti-street dog discourse not only justifies exceptional measures, but also asserts a populist moral high ground that forecloses deliberation on the topic of contention. The same populist framing was also adapted by pro-government public figures and AKP politicians to defer criticisms against the planned amendments to Law #5199 (see Chapter 4).

Lastly, Figures 11, 14, and 15 demonstrate a rather equal frequency distribution of many N-grams featured in their respective plots. Along with their lower repetition counts, this may suggest that many phrases presented in these plots were repetitively posted as a part of a co-tweeting campaign or an astroturfing effort. The latter case is especially likely for Figure 13, where highly similar – and in some cases, meaningless – phrases seem to be posted in equal amounts.

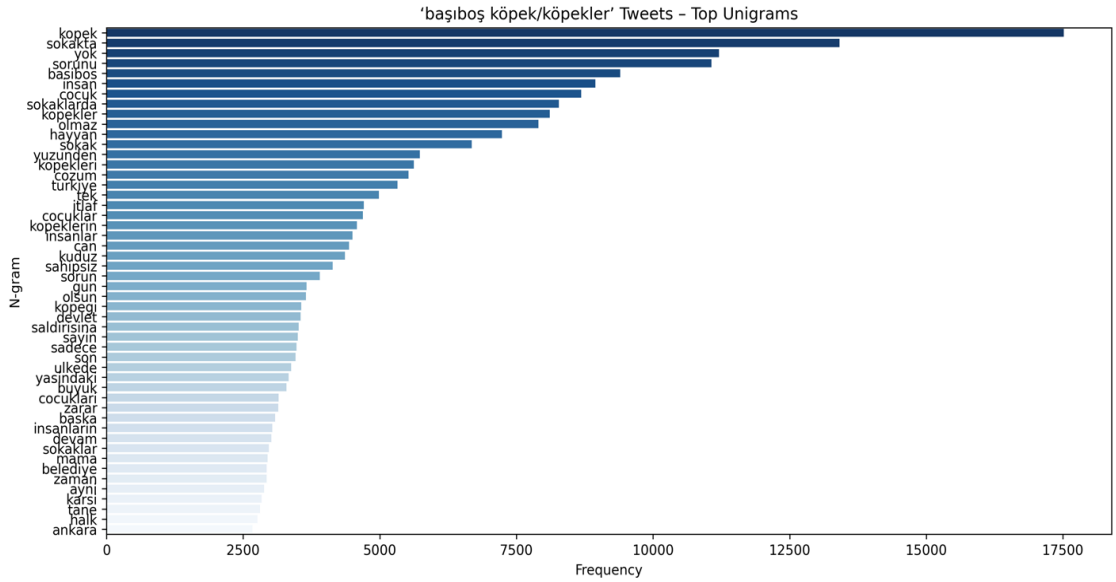

Figure 8. Frequency plot of top unigrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'stray dog/s'

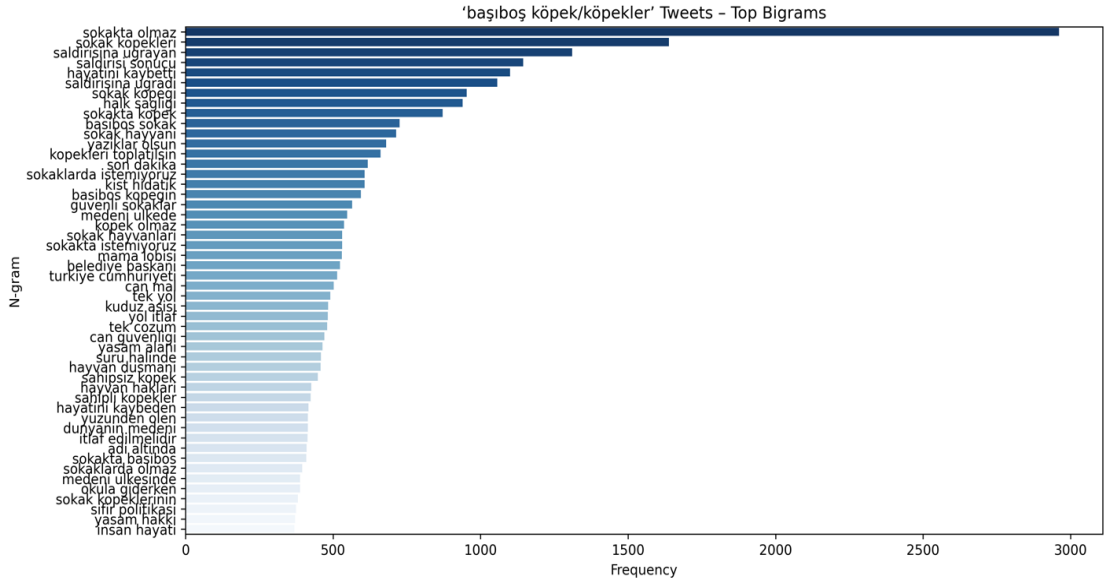

Figure 9. Frequency plot of top bigrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'stray dog/s'

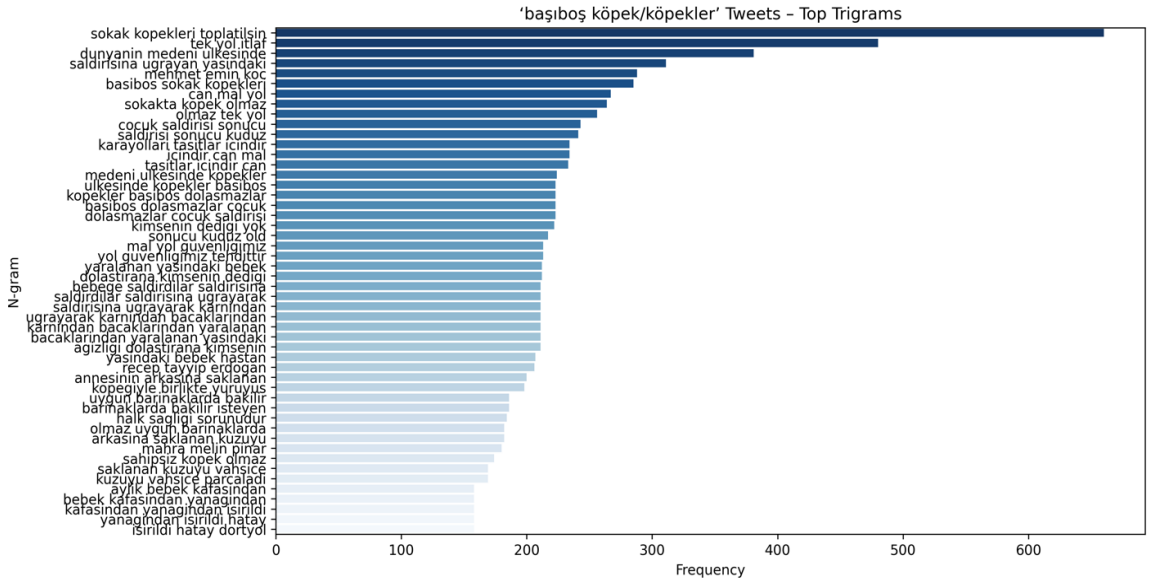

Figure 10. Frequency plot of top trigrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'stray dog/s'

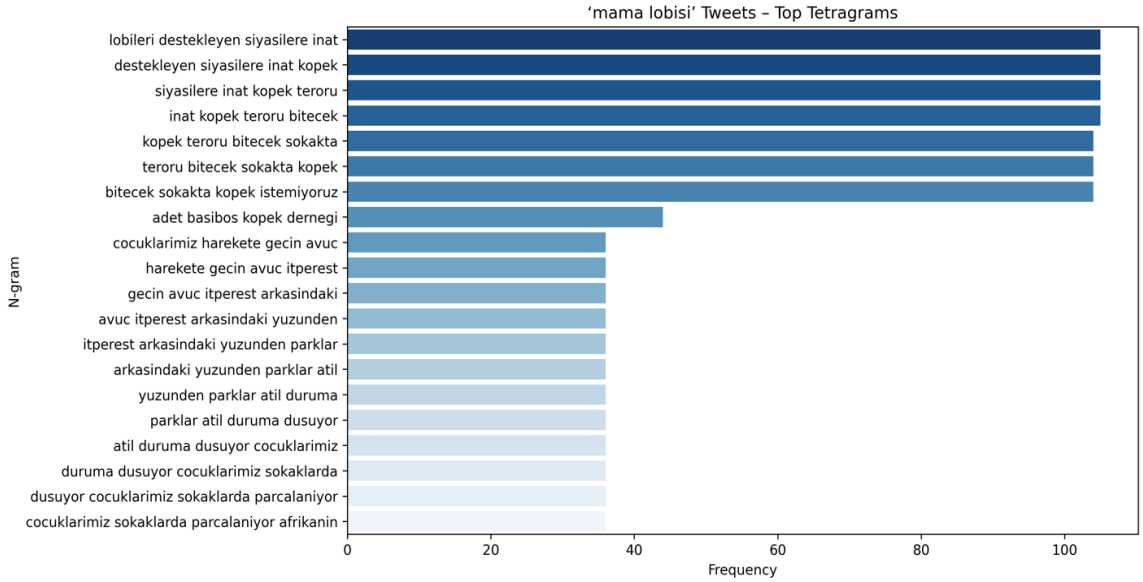

Figure 11. Frequency plot of top tetragrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'kibble lobby'

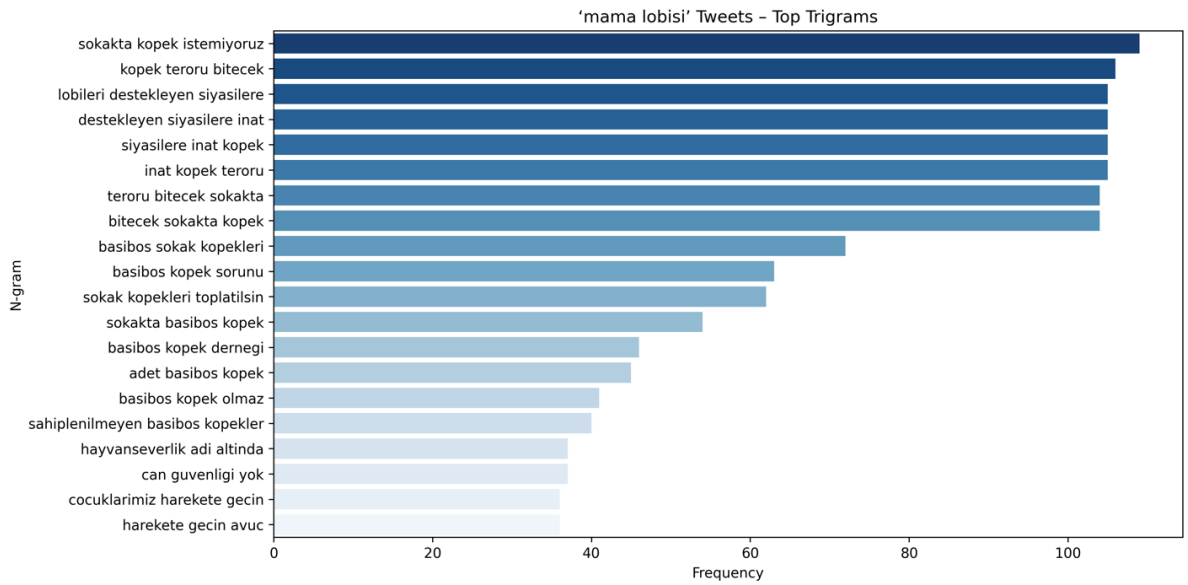

Figure 12. Frequency plot of top trigrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'kibble lobby'

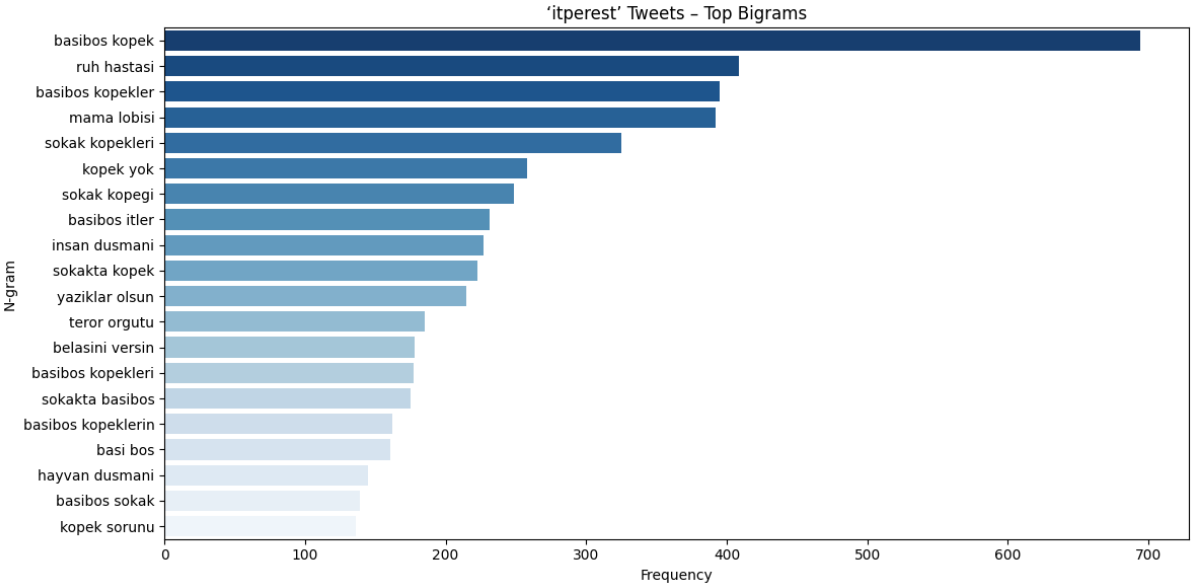

Figure 13. Frequency plot of top bigrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'dog-worshipper'

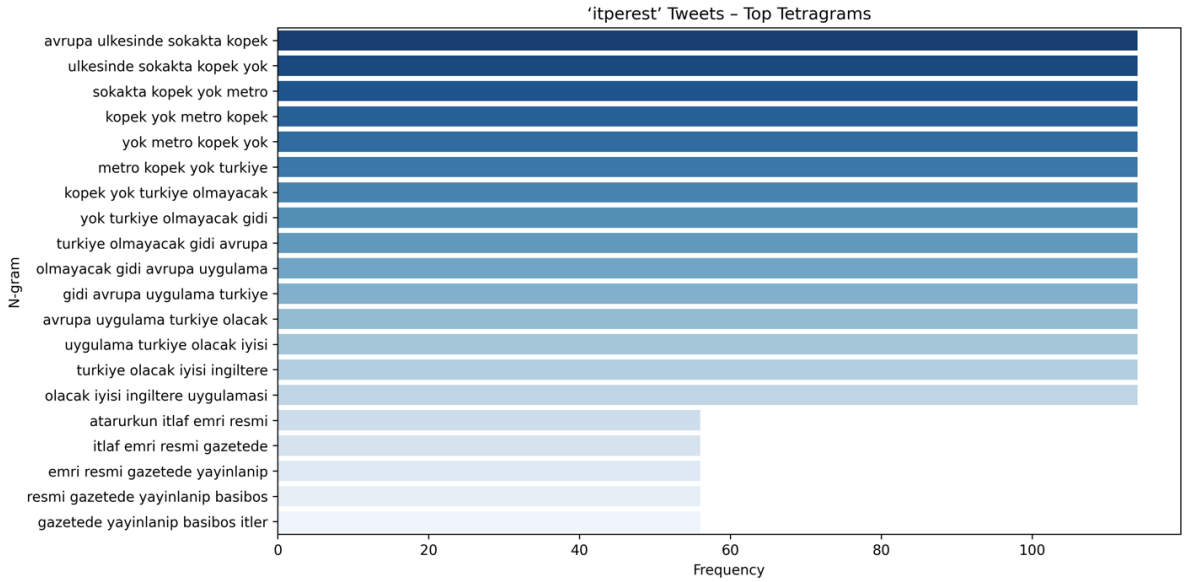

Figure 14. Frequency plot of top tetragrams appearing in tweets posted with the keyword 'dog-worshipper'

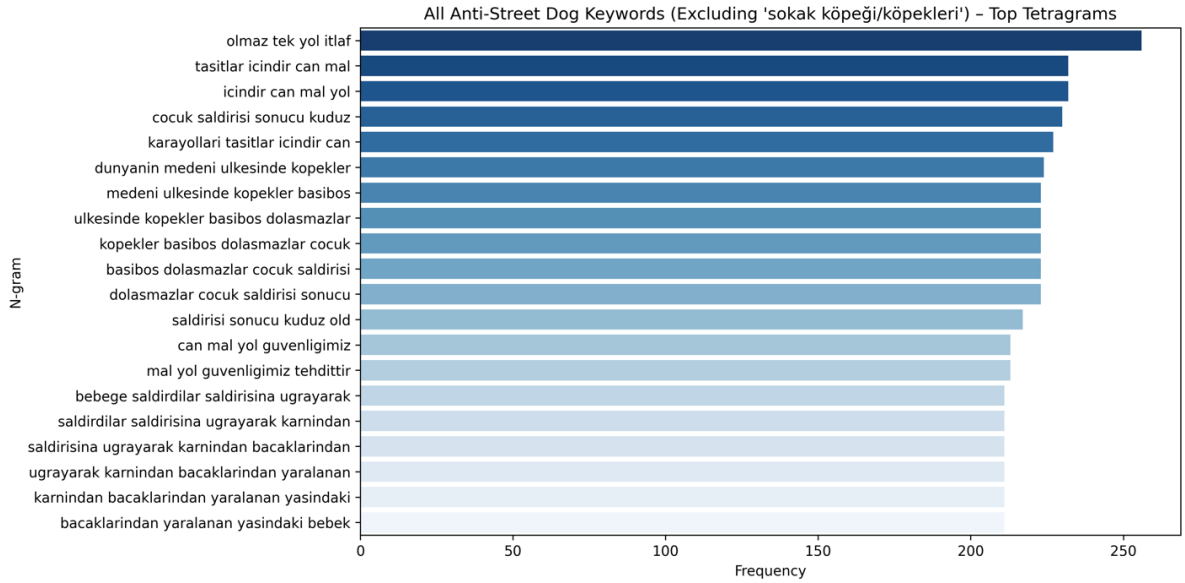

Figure 15. Frequency plot of top tetragrams appearing in tweets posted for all anti-street dog keywords

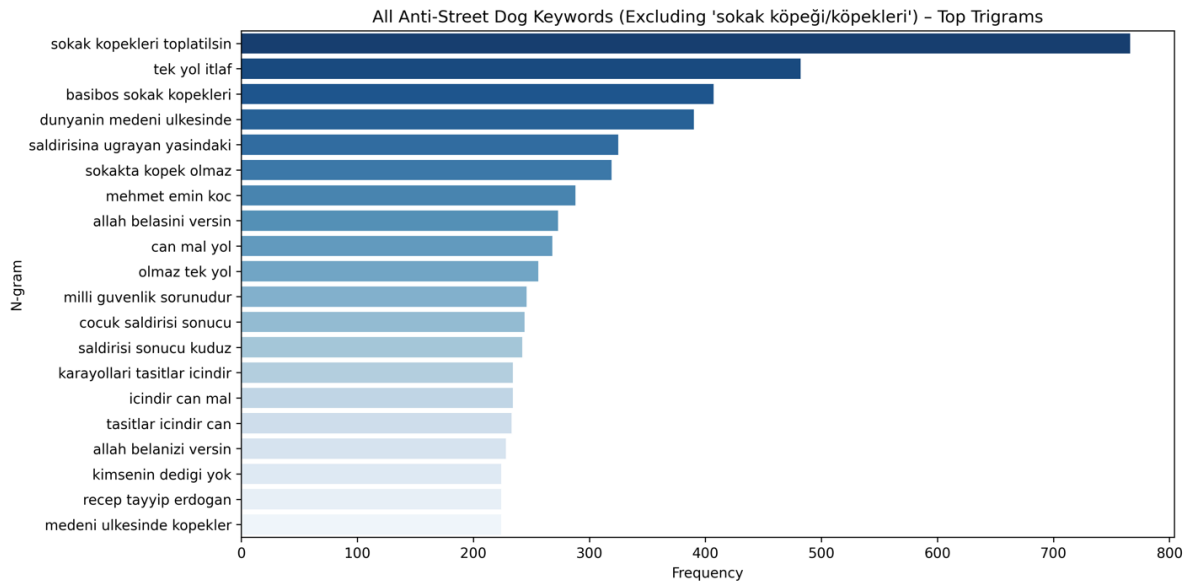

Figure 16. Frequency plot of top trigrams appearing in tweets posted for all anti-street dog keywords

3.4.4.2 Phrases frequently used in other tweets of the authors of the tweets with negative keywords

The broader tweeting behavior of users posting anti-street dog tweets further reinforces the securitizing nature of the movement. A frequency analysis of these users' general tweeting habits reveals an embeddedness in religious-nationalist, emotionally charged, and securitarian discourse. Unigrams and n-grams like *allah, türkiye,* "Turkey," *milli savunma bakanlığı* "Ministry of National Defense," *terör örgütü* "terrorist organization" and frequent references to president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as well as Atatürk reflect a discursive environment saturated with reverence for political authority, militarized vocabulary, and nationalist morality.

A noteworthy phrase found to be frequently used by the overwhelmingly male authors of the anti-street dog tweets is the tetragram *aile namus katili [6284] sayılı [kanun]* "[Law #6284 murderer of family and (family) honor"]. The reference here is to Law #6284, formally titled *Law on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women*, which was intended to codify the stipulations of the

Istanbul Convention – the Council of Europe's treaty on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Conservative critics argued that the Convention's protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity promoted homosexuality and transgenderism, and formed part of a broader campaign to "render the world genderless" (Zengin, 2025). Following Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 due to conservative demands, conservative and Islamist groups intensified their backlash against Law #6284, which they saw as an extension of the Convention (Togay, 2023). The prevalence of a phrase critical of Law #6284 in anti-street dog Twitter/X users suggests a convergence between the anti-street dog movement and the conspiratorial conservative backlash against the Istanbul Convention and Law #6284.

In combination of the prevalence of moralizing, emotionally charged formulaic phrases (e.g., *yazıklar olsun* "Shame!"; Figure 17; *allah belanı versin* "God damn you", Figure 19), this illustrates the affective and ideological mechanics through which street dogs are framed as a threat and animal rights proponents are delegitimized. The securitizing discourse on street dogs does not emerge ex nihilo, but is produced and cultivated within an existing field of nationalist-conservative sensibilities – making the "success" of the anti-street dog movement's securitizing move more intelligible in light of its audience's pre-existing affective and ideological orientations (Balzacq et al., 2016).

Lastly, the recurrence of phrases typical of news presentation like *son dakika haberler* ("breaking news," Figure 18), along with those targeting a specific locality as in *diyarbakir bolgeden son dakika* ("breaking from Diyarbakır area," Figure 20), suggests that digital news outlets and Twitter/X accounts of conventional media actively participated in the dissemination of anti-street dog discourse in local and

national contexts. This pattern reflects the mechanisms of agenda-setting, as the repeated invocation of journalistic framing devices across multiple accounts can elevate certain topics into broader public visibility, shaping the parameters of public debate. Rather than merely serving as a neutral "public town hall," social media here appears to function as a space where narratives are strategically amplified to influence public attention and perception (see Gilardi et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2016).

The prevalence of news accounts in anti-street dog Twitter/X users may also partially account for the popularity of references to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other government figures in the frequency charts. However, this may also suggest that anti-street dog news outlets heavily publicize content on government figures while being dismissive of the opposition, in line with general trends in Turkish media (Reporters without Borders Türkiye, 2024; Newman et al., 2024).

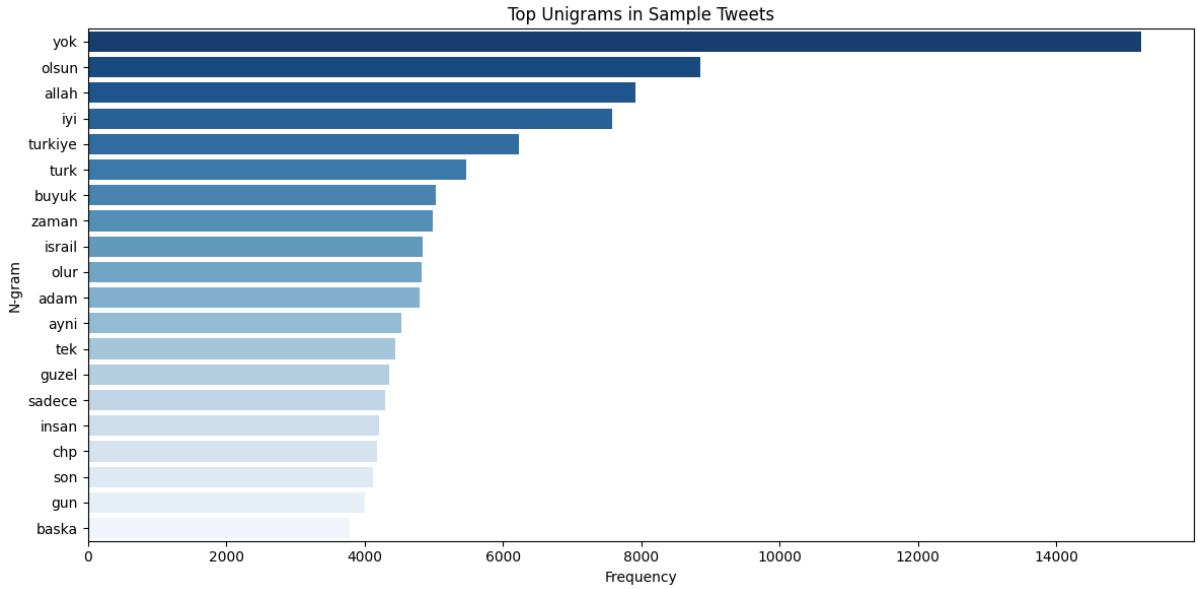

Figure 17. Frequency plot for the top unigrams used in sample tweets

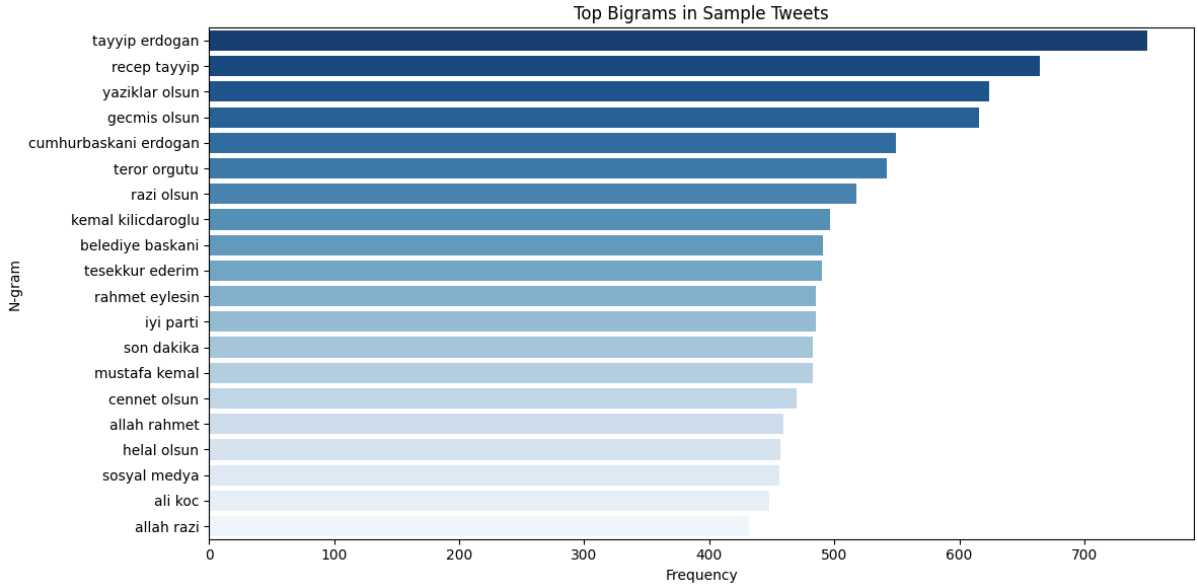

Figure 18. Frequency plot for the top bigrams used in sample tweets

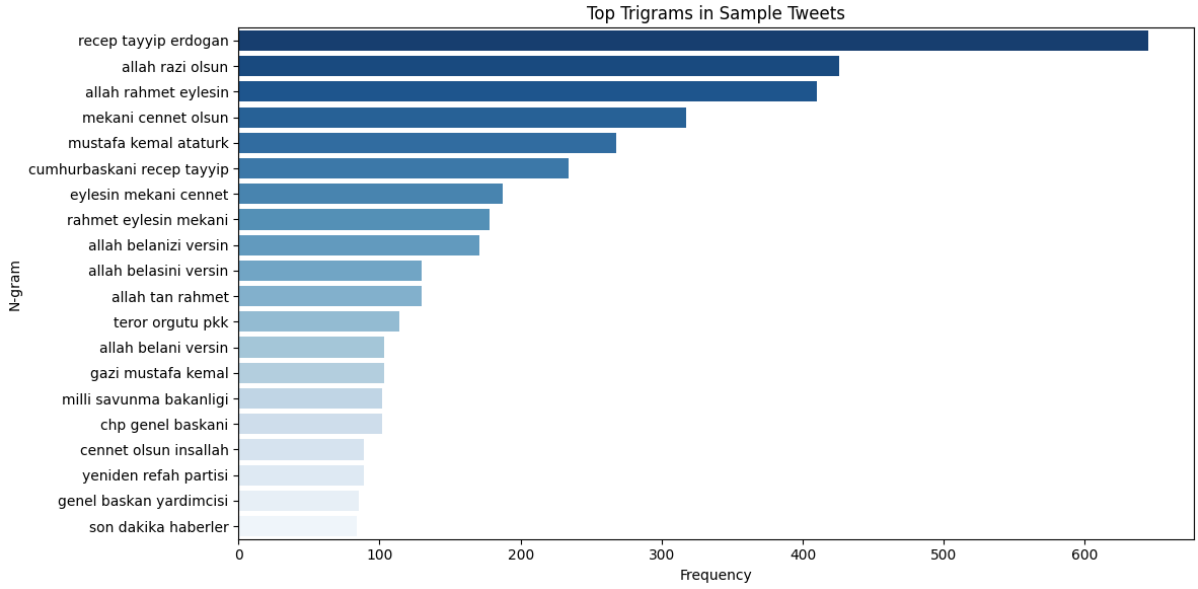

Figure 19. Frequency plot for the top trigrams used in sample tweets

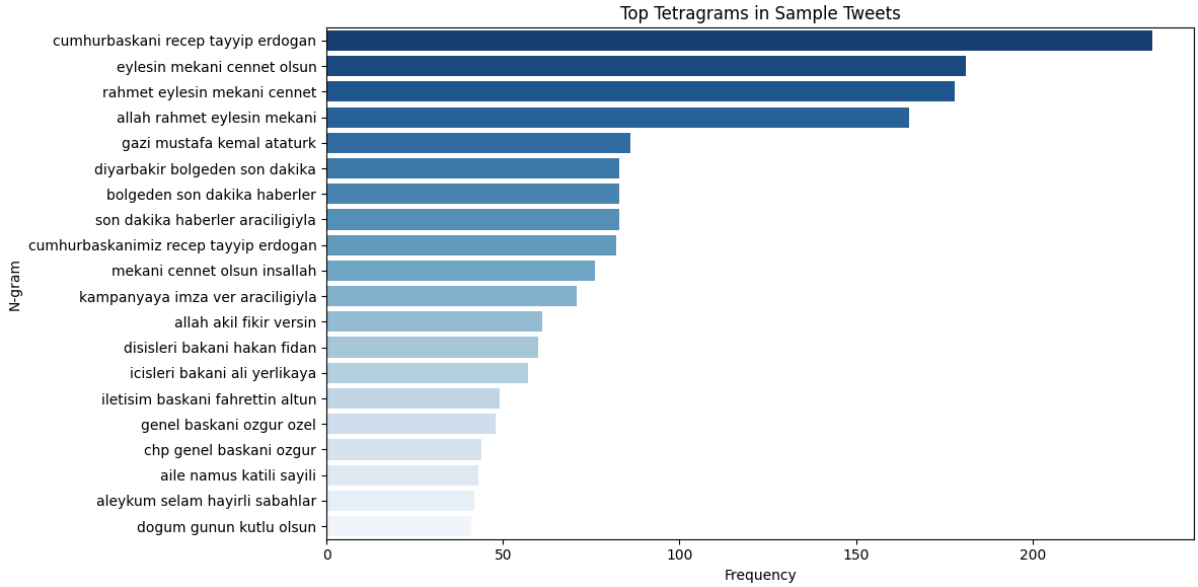

Figure 20. Frequency plot for the top tetragrams used in sample tweets

3.5 Conclusion and discussion: the anti-street dog movement as an alt-right phenomenon

This chapter has analyzed the online emergence and characteristics of Turkey's anti-street dog movement. It established a timeline of the movement's key turning points and examined its Twitter/X participant profile, revealing a heavily gendered participation pattern dominated by male users (85.1%). Frequency and repetition analyses uncovered the widespread use of pejorative tropes delegitimizing street dogs and animal rights advocates, populist rhetorics, and strong indications of artificial amplification of the movement through coordinated posting and employment of automated bots. Furthermore, frequency analysis of the tweet sample of anti-street dog posters revealed an overlap between anti-street dog posters and posters tweeting against Turkey's Law #6284 – indicating the conjoining of the anti-street dog movement and conservative anti-feminist sentiment.

While Turkey's anti-street dog movement may appear at first glance as a locally specific reaction to urban governance issues, the findings of this chapter

suggest it is better understood as a vernacular articulation of an organized alt-right discourse. Through a combination of securitizing tropes, algorithmic amplification, affectively charged rhetoric, and majoritarian populism, the movement reproduces a recognizable discursive structure – one that resonates structurally and stylistically with alt-right formations globally, while remaining embedded in Turkish political culture and media dynamics.

This alt-right discourse around street dogs does not emerge from a vacuum. As the frequency analysis results demonstrate, the anti-street dog discourse draws on a broader field of nationalist-conservative sensibilities, where emotionally saturated language, moralizing binaries, and appeals to national security are dominant. In this context, street dogs arguably become a symbolic screen onto which anxieties about control, discipline, and national identity are projected. Through the use of pejorative designations such as *başıboş köpek* ("stray dog"), *mama lobisi* ("kibble lobby"), and *itperest* ("dog-worshipper"), the movement delegitimizes both animal rights discourse and its defenders. These phrases mimic the delegitimizing shorthand typical of alt-right rhetoric elsewhere, collapsing political disagreement into moral pathology.

The movement relies on securitization to construct street dogs as existential threats in order to produce consent for its agenda. It portrays the existence of street dogs not merely as an occasional urban nuisance, but as a danger to children, to public order, and even to Turkey's claim to civilization itself. Such framings, often punctuated with invocations of European relationships with unowned animals, rabies, and national-mythological figures like Atatürk, are in line with the alt-right's characteristic strategy to turn otherwise uncontroversial or non-politicized cultural and social notions into urgent matters requiring unconventional action. The

overwhelming gender imbalance in participation – with more than 85% of anti-street dog tweets being authored by men –, along with the prevalence of anti-feminist attitudes among the sample tweets of the anti-street dog movement's participants, support the view that the discourse performs a kind of masculinist protectionism (Young, 2003), in which public safety becomes a proxy for restoring male-coded authority over space, risk, and vulnerability. This reflects what Connell (2005) describes as the affective logic of masculine supremacy – a sense of entitlement to manage and contain perceived threats to patriarchal control. In the alt-right's broader ideological repertoire, this logic is often mobilized to protect not only women and children but the "imagined nation" itself from contamination (Miller-Idriss, 2020).

Additionally, the chapter's MinHash LSH analysis revealed strong signs of artificial amplification of the popularity of anti-street sentiment on Twitter/X. The unusually consistent repetition of tweets using negative keywords, combined with a temporal spike in such tweets in April 2023, suggests the presence of coordinated attempts to shape the public agenda via platform manipulation. While such efforts are not exclusive to the alt-right and its close kin far-right, their strategic use of visibility, emotional resonance, and repetition-over-persuasiveness reflects what Marwick & Lewis (2017) describe as attention hacking – a tactic central to alt-right digital campaigns.

Finally, the movement's framing of its opponents – described as [*bir] avuç* ('a handful') of marginal radicals – invokes a populist binary: the pure people versus the corrupt elite whose views are unrepresentative of the public interest. This rhetorical move, which falsely constructs animal rights activists as a loud minority obstructing the will and well-being of the majority, mirrors the populist dynamics described by Stavrakakis (2014), in which democracy is reimagined not as pluralism

but as moral majoritarianism. In the Turkish case, this framing has been adopted by government-aligned media and political elites, further legitimizing the movement's demands (see Chapter 4).

In sum, Turkey's anti-street dog movement enacts a locally situated pronunciation of alt-right politics. It fuses nationalist affect, masculine-coded securitization, and digital coordination into a moralizing discourse that positions itself as a grassroots uprising against disorder, contamination, and elite betrayal (*lobileri destekleyen siyasilere inat* 'in spite of the politicians supporting lobbies,' Figure 10). Notably, this movement's invocation of civilizational anxieties deeply embedded in Turkey's secular-nationalist Kemalist political discourse (Ergin, 2008) is not in contradiction with the apparent conservative-Muslim orientation of many of its supporters as it may initially appear to be. On the contrary, this convergence illustrates how alt-right discourse often draws in non-explicitly far-right (or alternatively put, ideologically diverse) actors by embedding its agenda in seemingly mainstream concerns: public sanitation, being "civilized", and children's safety. This elasticity – the ability to hook different audiences through moral panic rather than doctrinal purity – is arguably a part of what differentiates the alt-right from far-right (Hawley, 2019) as well as what makes the alt-right a potent cultural force (see Introduction; Chapter 4).

By providing an analysis of how Turkey's anti-street dog movement constructs its agenda, mobilizes its audiences, and leverages digital platforms, this chapter contributes to a broader understanding of how the alt-right logic localizes and influences political agendas. In the following chapter, I will analyze the co-optation of the alt-right mobilization against Turkey's street dogs by the country's

smaller right-wing parties – and following the gains they made in the March 2024 local elections, the adoption of the anti-street dog agenda by the governing AKP.

CHAPTER 4

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER: THE ANTI-STREET DOG MOVEMENT ENTERS THE MAINSTREAM AGENDA

Building on the previous chapter's analysis of Turkey's anti-street dog movement on Twitter/X, where patterns of gendered participation, repetitive messaging, and discursive framing suggested both ideological alignment with alt-right discourse and signs of artificial amplification, this chapter explores how the alt-right movement that was gradually co-opted by minor far-right parties and ultimately adopted by the governing AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Justice and Development Party*), culminating in controversial amendments to Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals in line with the anti-street dog movement's demands.

The chapter argues that this amendment, drafted and passed shortly after the AKP's unprecedented defeat in the 2024 local elections, represents an instance of a fringe alt-right discourse marching into the control of the mainstream political agenda. By codifying their mass removal and allowing the killing of street dogs under the loosely defined justifications of public order and population control, the amendment marked a significant shift from Turkey's legal framework protecting and endorsing, at least formally, street animals' right to exist in the environments they cohabitate with humans.

To trace how this shift occurred, I begin by analyzing electoral manifestos from 2019 to 2024, showing how street animals moved from being marginal policy concerns to key ideological flashpoints, particularly for far-right parties like YRP (Yeniden Refah Partisi, *New Welfare Party*) and BBP (Büyük Birlik Partisi, *Grand Union Party*). I then reconstruct the political context that led the AKP to adopt and

legislate the anti-street dog agenda, despite scant public support and strong civil society opposition. This is followed by a discussion of the original amendment plans, the legislative revisions made in response to public backlash, and the role of government-aligned media, especially state-run TRT Haber, in disseminating state-supported anti-street dog framings and delegitimizing animal welfare advocacy.

Finally, I analyze the parliamentary process surrounding the amendment to Law #5199 and President Erdoğan's rhetoric to show how securitization and moral panic were adopted by AKP to manufacture (or coerce) consent for the amendments. I conclude that while the anti-street dog movement failed to gain popular backing, it nonetheless succeeded in achieving legislative change – an outcome made possible by Turkey's competitive authoritarian structure, which puts elite alignment and institutional control over public consensus or expert opinion in policymaking.

4.1 Anti-street dog movement's co-optation by minor parties

Triangulating data from Google Trends, Twitter/X, and media outlets, the previous chapter constructed a timeline of the anti-street dog movement. In support of the results suggesting that the anti-street dog movement gained traction in the lead up to Turkey's March 31 2024 local elections, as they were co-opted by minor far-right parties, this section will comparatively analyze the electoral manifestos of political parties for the most recent three elections that are still available to the public as of April 2025.

Party manifestos constitute formalized articulations of party platforms and policy priorities, serving both as signaling tools to the electorate and as instruments for agenda-setting. Analyzing how (and whether) street dogs or, more broadly, street animals are referenced in these documents enables a comparison across election

cycles and provides evidence of how a previously fringe issue gained traction in the lead-up to the March 2024 local elections. Table 4 contains a summary of the four major (AKP, CHP[6], Pro-Kurdish opposition, MHP[7]) as well as the two minor anti-street dog (YRP and BBP) political parties' mentions of street animals and/or street dogs in the 2019, 2023, and 2024 Turkish elections:

[6] Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (*Republican People's Party*).
[7] Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (*Nationalist Movement Party*).

Table 4. Mentions of Street Animals or Street Dogs in Political Parties' Electoral Manifestos for the 2019, 2023, and 2024 Turkish Elections
Sources: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (2019, 2023, 2024), Büyük Birlik Partisi (2024), Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (2019, 2024), Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (2019, 2023), Millet İttifakı (2023), Halkların Demokratik Partisi (2019), Yeşiller ve Sol Gelecek Partisi (2023), BİA Haber Merkezi, (2024, 08 02), TRT Haber (2024), Yeniden Refah Partisi (2023, 2024)

Year Election type	AKP	MHP	CHP[8]	Pro-Kurdish Opposition[9]	BBP	YRP
2019 **Local**	No policy mention; vague promise of "cities where all living beings… live in safety alongside humans."	No mention	Mentions animal rights protection; pledges NGO cooperation and protection of street cats' and dogs' rights to live in cities	Promises action against violence by humans; pledges food and medical support for street animals	No manifesto available	Party not yet founded
2023 **General**	No policy mention; highlights past budget allocation for ABC programs and municipal shelters	No mention	No mention	Promises legal action against violence toward animals, incl. in shelters	No manifesto available	Uses *başıboş sokak köpeği* ('stray street dog'); renounces culling but supports removing dogs from streets
2024 **Local**	Acknowledges rising population; vague action promise (could be ABC or culling); uses securitarian rhetoric ("safe streets"); uses term *sokak hayvanı* 'street animal'	No mention	Pledges cooperation with central gov't for ABC procedures, improving, shelters	Promises to prevent violence toward street animals; promises frequent animal rights trainings for the public in all DEM-run municipalities	Uses *sokak hayvanı* ('street animal'); pledges ABC procedures, claims violent dog behavior will be improved with care	Harsher tone than in 2023; mentions *mama lobisi* ('kibble lobby'); invokes "children vs. animals" dilemma; renounces culling but emphasizes urgency

[8] CHP did not issue a separate manifesto besides its Nation Alliance's (*Millet İttifakı*) joint manifesto in the 2023 elections. The table features the Nation Alliance's joint declaration as CHP's manifesto.
[9] The pro-Kurdish opposition contested the elections listed here under different parties: as Halkların Demokrasi Partisi (*Peoples' Democracy Party,* HDP) in 2019, as Yeşiller ve Sol Gelecek Partisi (*Greens and Left Future Party,* Yeşil Sol) in 2023, and as *Halkların Demokrasi ve Eşitlik Partisi* (*Peoples' Democracy and Equality Party*, DEM Parti) in 2024.

The comparison outlined in Table 4 is a proxy for the overall evolution of the discourse around street animals on ideological grounds. In the campaigning for the March 2019 local elections, which preceded the anti-street dog movement's gaining traction online for approximately 1.5 years, street animals were framed, if they were mentioned at all, as subjects of municipal care and urban coexistence – they were not yet politicized as a matter of central governance or a threat to public order. While mainstream parties continued this attitude in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2023, YRP's election manifesto signaled the start of alt-right influence in party politics by adopting a delegitimizing language against street dogs (*başıboş sokak köpeği,* 'stray street dog') and officially endorsing collecting street dogs off the streets. On the other hand, referencing Islamic values, the party also underlined their support for animals' right to live, for which they pledged to place the collected street animals in high-technology animal shelters run by qualified staff.

In line with the finding establishing a link between the anti-street dog posters and anti-Istanbul Convention posters on Twitter/X (see Chapter 3, Section 4.4.2), YRP's 2023 election manifesto also pledged to amend Law #6284 On the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women in line with conservative demands and to "disband the LGBT associations that subvert the society's general moral structure[10]" (Yeniden Refah Partisi, 2023). The co-optation of anti-feminist policies with those in line with the anti-street dog movement's demands further points to the embeddedness of the anti-street dog discourse within a bigger alt-to-far-right political discourse: as Hawley (2019) points out, far-right parties often act as "pathways" for alt-right discourse to enter into party politics, a pattern exemplified

[10] On an amusing note, the same manifesto claims that growing up in dysfunctional households may result in children inheriting "sociological problems."

here by YRP's adoption of the anti-street dog movement's core demands (i.e., removing street dogs from streets) alongside reactionary conservative positions.

In the campaign period preceding the March 2024 local elections, YRP maintained its negative 2023 campaign positions on LGBTQ rights, Law #6284, and street dogs. Furthermore, the party's 2024 manifesto is noticeably more in line with anti-street dog rhetoric as it originated and was disseminated on Twitter/X: YRP used the anti-street dog framing *mama lobisi* 'kibble lobby' to delegitimize those who may criticize the party's stance against street dogs, falsely and without evidence suggested that violent dogs were causing fatalities and injuries on a daily basis, and imposed a false moral dilemma between protecting children's safety and animal rights. Most strikingly, the party's 2024 manifesto further stated that "[Turkey's] cities are under invasion by stray street dogs [sic] under the name of loving animals (*hayvanseverlik*)" (Yeniden Refah Partisi, 2024, p. 5).

This framing, which casts Turkey's street dogs as invaders and animal rights defenders as their collaborators, directly mirrors the alt-right's use of the rhetoric of invasion to depict certain groups (including but not limited to immigrants and queer individuals) as existential threats and certain political elites as their enablers (Miller-Idriss, 2020). Whereas the ultranationalist, anti-immigration Zafer Partisi (*Victory Party*, ZP) draws from this rhetoric to provoke a moral panic against the Syrian immigrants in Turkey (Körükmez, 2025; also see Özdağ, 2022), YRP appropriates the same logic to mobilize affect against a non-human population.

Local elections of 2024 also saw the governing AKP shift from its benevolent-yet-trivializing (2019) and technocratic-and-neutral (2023) attitudes toward absorbing the rising alt-right and far-right discourse against street dogs. In 2019, AKP's manifesto framed cities as shared habitats for "all living beings,"

avoiding any reference to street animals as a policy concern. By 2023, as anti-street dog discourse gained visibility online, the party manifesto employed a technocratic tone, highlighting past budget allocations for sterilization and shelters, albeit only in passing. However, in 2024, AKP began to echo securitarian framings of the debate around street dogs while still standing on a neutral ground. The party's 2024 manifesto recognized "growing populations of street animals" as an emerging security problem and pledged undefined yet comprehensive and coordinated action (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, 2024). This ambiguity arguably allowed the party to signal alignment with the anti-street dog movement's agenda without explicitly committing to any particular solution, avoiding the risk of alienating either supporters of harsh measures or voters who empathize with street animals.

The anti-street dog rhetoric was also visible in YRP's 2024 electoral campaign, which incorporated issues like the so-called stray dog problem, corruption, waste of public funds, and anti-LGBTQ stances under an overarching theme of morality. Promising voters to administer municipalities in line with a conservative morality based on Sunni Islam under the motto *Municipalism with Morals*, one YRP video ad campaign declared: "If there is no morality, there are stray dogs – we will keep our streets save and keep our children alive" (Yeniden Refah Partisi, 2024b).

Figure 21. YRP electoral campaign ads (right) reading "Real Municipal Work Happens through Morality" in Istanbul
(haber7.com)

Figure 22. YRP banner reading "If there is no morality, there is LGBT / We will drive perverted organizations out of our city" with the image of the party leader Fatih Erbakan, location unknown
(TamgaTürk)

Figure 23 A social media content with the YRP leader Fatih Erbakan's signature. The red sign above the feral-looking dog reads "STOP!", with the title reading: "The dog terror must be stopped!" The text also openly claims that YRP will "collect the stray dogs off the streets" immediately after the 31 March elections (@HazinogLuu on X)

YRP's morality-centered electoral campaign therefore co-opted the anti-street dog rhetoric and anti-LGBTQ sentiment along with less polarizing conceptions of perceived immoral acts like wastefulness and corruption to portray the governing AKP as insufficiently moral. In the specific social media content featured in Figure 23 and circulated on Twitter/X prior to the 2024 local elections, the YRP leader again associates the existence of free-ranging dogs in streets as a "morality problem" in addition to being a security issue. In doing so, the content uses one of the negative keywords featured in Chapter 3's social media analysis, "dog terror" (*köpek terörü*). The YRP campaign thus fused securitarian and moral panic into a singular discursive strategy.

On the other hand, BBP chairman Mustafa Destici regularly promised that his party would “clean the streets of stray dogs” in municipalities where his party wins the local elections, even going as far as suggesting the early Republican era edict ordering the culling of ownerless dogs be re-enacted (Independent Türkçe, 2023). This came in contrast to his party’s manifesto claiming the party would follow ABC procedures and aim to improve violent street animal behavior by ameliorating their living conditions (Büyük Birlik Partisi, 2024). Destici would later publicly announce his support for the “euthanization” (*uyutulma*) of street dogs and boast about the new BBP local administration delivering its promise to clean the dogs off streets in Sivas while on a joint press release with the CHP leader Özgür Özel, in which the latter denounced plans for mass removal and culling of street dogs for his part (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2024 05 23).

The moralization and securitization of street dogs by YRP and BBP campaigns became part of a broader discursive strategy in the lead-up to the 2024 local elections, as smaller far-right parties attempted to frame the governing right-wing AKP as morally inadequate and administratively ineffective. These dynamics, along with the main opposition party CHP’s significant electoral gains, set the stage for a historic electoral upset for AKP that would catapult the street dog issue into the heart of mainstream politics.

4.2 Local elections of March 2024: AKP’s loss and the catapulting of street dogs into the agenda

The Turkish elections for local administrations held on 31 March 2024 concluded in a historic defeat for the governing AKP and a no less historic victory for the main opposition CHP. AKP, which had dominated Turkish politics since its foundation in

2002, had not been the first party in an election for the first time in its 22-year history. On the other hand, the main opposition party, center-left to left-wing, social democratic CHP, scored its first election victory since the parliamentary elections of 1977. Having occurred almost a year after the presidential and parliamentary elections of May 2023, which had resulted in the unexpected defeat of the CHP-led Nation Alliance in parliamentary and presidential races against AKP and Erdoğan, the defeat in 2024's local elections had a profound shock amongst what may be regarded as AKP's intelligentsia as well as its supporters. Table 5 contains a breakdown of the results of the March 2024 local elections.

Table 5. Results of 31 March 2024 Turkish Local Elections. Municipal assembly races are not included (TRT Haber via Anadolu Agency & NTV)

Party Name	Political Position	Core Ideologies	Vote Share (%)	Vote Count	City/Metropolitan Municipalities Won	County-Level Municipalities Won
CHP (Republican People's Party)	Center-left to left-wing	Left-wing Kemalism, Social Democracy	37.77	17,391,548	35	337
AKP (Justice and Development Party)	Right-wing to far-right	Islamism, Neo-Ottomanism, Social Conservatism, Populism	35.49	16,339,771	24	357
DEM Parti (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party)	Center-left to left-wing	Minority Rights, Kurdish Interests	5.70	2,625,588	10	65
MHP (Nationalist Movement Party)	Far-right	Turkish Ultranationalism, Turkish-Islamic Synthesis	4.99	2,297,662	8	122
YRP (New Welfare Party)	Far-right	Islamism, *Milli Görüş*[11], Neo-Ottomanism, Social Conservatism	6.19	2,851,784	2	39
İYİP (Good Party)	Centre-right	Right-wing Kemalism, Turkish Nationalism	3.77	1,735,924	1	23
BBP (Great Unity Party)	Far-right	Turkish Ultranationalism, Islamism, Sunni Sectarianism	0.43	200,301	1	14

[11] *Milli Görüş* ("National Vision") is an Islamist political tradition pioneered by Necmettin Erbakan in the 1970s, emphasizing moral governance, reorganizing the economy along Islamic guidelines, and skepticism against the West. Though the AKP emerged from this tradition, it distanced itself from *Milli Görüş* to adopt a more pro-Western, market-oriented platform in the early 2000s (Tuğal, 2009). YRP, led by Necmettin Erbakan's son Fatih Erbakan, continues to explicitly align with *Milli Görüş* principles.

Figure 24. Map of Turkey showing city and metropolis-wide municipal race results. Created by the author based on TRT Haber data using mapchart.net

Figure 25. Map of Turkey with Yozgat, Sivas, and Şanlıurfa provinces highlighted according to their respective local election winners

While the election results might not appear to constitute a decisive defeat for the AKP at first glance, several factors contributed to why they were widely perceived as such, both within the AKP and among the opposition. Firstly, although AKP remained in control of many municipalities across the country, it failed to

regain control of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, which it narrowly lost to CHP in 2019, with the AKP candidate trailing behind CHP's Ekrem İmamoğlu by 11.5% this time and İmamoğlu receiving a total of 51.1% of the vote. Moreover, AKP lost many county and city-level municipalities traditionally considered to be AKP strongholds, like İstanbul's Üsküdar district, which it lost to CHP, and the city-level municipalities of Yozgat and Şanlıurfa to YRP, and Sivas to BBP – parties farther to the right than the AKP (Gökçen, 2024; Sezer & Karakaş, 2024; Krzyżanowska, 2024). Secondly, the loss of first place to an opposition party in an election, in combination with the failure of AKP candidate Erdoğan to win last year's presidential election in the first round, was interpreted amongst opposition and pro-AKP circles alike as another step in a progressive decline of AKP. Thirdly, and crucially, some 60% of Turkey's population and 73% of the country's economy were now locally administered by the main opposition party (Gökçen, 2024).

As mentioned earlier, in the municipalities that shifted from AKP control to other Islamist and far-right parties, such as Yozgat and Şanlıurfa, which were won by the traditionalist-Islamist YRP, and Sivas, which went to the locally prominent, ultranationalist, and Sunni-sectarian BBP, the winning candidates campaigned on explicitly anti-street dog platforms. These victories not only marked a novel rejection of the AKP by parts of its traditional electorate, but also contributed to the normalization of anti-street dog stances as a legitimate platform for local governance, granting institutional backing and normalcy to a discourse that had previously circulated mainly through online channels and remained endorsed by fringe political organizations.

The added sense of loss stemming from having to concede its traditional strongholds to minor opposition parties with ideologies not far removed from AKP

further led pro-AKP circles to provide an "autocritique" to make sense of the behavior of the electorate, which was interpreted to have punished AKP for its policy failures while staying loyal to its ideological base and the broader lines of AKP-led People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) (Robins, 2024; Solaker, 2024). This view holds that AKP has strayed off its founding principles and has lost touch with the electorate, including its support base. In addition to recognizing the economic grievances of the electorate, pro-AKP pundits and columnists in the immediate aftermath of the election highlighted successful campaigns by candidates running on anti-street dog platforms against AKP candidates. On April 1, just one day after the election, influential AKP-oriented pundit and columnist Hilal Kaplan mentioned the "stray street dogs" alongside the economic hardships endured by pensioners and minimum wage workers among the "many causes" of AKP's disappointing electoral performance (Kaplan, 2024).

As AKP dealt with the aftermath of the local elections, even Erdoğan went out to speak publicly in front of his party about their need to "straighten themselves out" since "keeping a distance from the people" had "no place in their political tradition" (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2024 05 15; also see Sezer & Karakaş, 2024). In late May 2024, news sources reported that Erdoğan had impatiently instructed his advisors to start working on an amendment to Law #5199 without delay (Deniz, 2024; Oda TV, 2024).

4.2.1 The Potential Impact of the "Stray Dog Problem" on Voter Behavior

It is important to note here that no reports or research that have been made public suggest a relation between a perceived "stray dog problem" and voter behavior. A Turkey-wide public opinion poll conducted by ASAL Research with 2,000 people

between 10-17 July 2024 showed that only 0.5% of the participants saw the "stray dog problem" as the most pressing issue the country is facing (ASAL Araştırma, 2024). The leading answer in the poll was "Economy/cost of living" with 64.6%. Other answers included "immigrants" with 6.2%, "lack of justice" with 5.5%, "unemployment" with 3.4%, and "education" with 3.0%. The only answer that was more unpopular than the so-called stray dog problem and its 0.5% of the answer share was "the constitution" with 0.4%.

While it is worth noting that the ASAL Research (2024) poll was conducted almost three months after the local elections, its emphasis on the economic motivations guiding voter behavior highly matched the post-election voter behavior and opinion survey held by KONDA (2024a) in mid-April, only two weeks after the election. Although the detailed KONDA (2024a) report does not mention the "stray dog problem," it is plausible to suggest, based on the two polls' co-occurrence on the economic priorities of the electorate, that the said issue's impact has also remained stable.

The voter behavior literature on Turkey has long purported that the success and electoral loyalty AKP enjoys had its roots in its perceived success in economic stability and growth (e.g., Aytaç, 2018; Gürel et al., 2019; Kozal et al., 2024). Moreover, as Akarca (2019) points out, Turkish politics has a history of minor coalition partners emerging stronger in the aftermath of economic downturns while major partners are held responsible by the electorate. While YRP and BBP have never officially been coalition partners of the AKP, as the country's post-2018 presidential system bestows the government formation process on the president and not the parliament, both were members of the AKP-led People's Alliance along with MHP and the radical Islamist HÜDA-PAR (Hür Dava Partisi, *Free Cause Party*)

during the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. Both parties endorsed Erdoğan in 2023's presidential race, and although YRP decided to leave the alliance before the 2024 local elections, BBP remained a member of the People's Alliance. Therefore, a more plausible explanation for the electoral defeat of AKP in its former provincial and rural strongholds to the other members of its far-right alliance would be that the "stray dog problem" played only a minor part in the electoral behavior, if at all – while economic grievances had a significant impact.

Regardless of any proof of actual popular demand in favor of such a measure, news about AKP drafting an amendment to Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals went public in late May following Erdoğan's orders to his party (Diken, 2024). Some initial considerations for amending the law, as the press broke, were eventually changed following public backlash, although the main premise of the amendment was kept, namely, abolishing Animal Birth Control (ABC) in favor of stipulating that street dogs must be collected from streets and granting the municipalities the right to put them down. In the next section, I will break down the components of the 2024 amendment to Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals, as it was first drafted and finalized, and then compare it with the original 2004 law to discuss the implications of the amendments. I will then follow by providing an account of the parliamentary process around the proposed amendments before concluding this chapter.

4.3 Public discussions of amending the law and producing consent

Table 6. Comparison of the Unamended Version of Law #5199 on Protection of Animals with the First Drafted Amendment and Final Amended Version
(Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi TBMM Grup Başkanlığı, 2024; Deniz, 2024; Diken, 2024; Resmi Gazete, 2004; T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi, n.d.)

Unamended Law #5199 (2004)	Initial Amendment Draft	Final Amendment
Municipalities must follow Animal Birth Control (ABC) procedures to control street animal population, returning them to where they live after sterilization	Municipalities shall relocate all unowned animals to shelters	Municipalities shall relocate all unowned animals to shelters (ambiguous as to if cats are excluded)
Municipalities cannot put down animals	Animals shall be put down if they are not adopted within 30 days from the shelter	Municipalities have the right to have animals put down if they constitute a threat for public safety, if they are from outlawed breeds, disabled, sick, or aggressive "by or in the observation of a veterinarian." Animals who are not put down shall be sterilized but they shall not be returned to their previous environment.
The state recognizes and endorses unowned animals' right to live	*no data*	The provision recognizing unowned animals' right to live is removed
Recognizes "owned animals" (i.e. companion animals), "controlled animals," and "unowned" animals	Distinguishes between "owned" and "unowned" animals	Distinguishes between "owned" and "unowned" animals
Introduces "Animal Care Volunteers" and establishes that municipalities shall work in coordination with local volunteers	*no data*	Removes the provision introducing "Animal Care Volunteers," annulling the concept
No sanctions stipulated for municipal administrators failing to enforce ABC, mistreatment of animals are considered a misdemeanor	*no data*	Stipulates up to 2 years prison term for municipal administrators failing to comply with the law

As AKP's plans to amend Law #5199 went public in late May, the anti-street dog movement, which had thus far remained limited with alt-right endorsement on social media platforms and limited far-right political support from BBP and YRP, officially and successfully catapulted itself into the center of Turkey's right-wing politics. However, news about an eminent amendment also broke a long-impending discussion in Turkey about street animals, as the anti-street dog movement's increasing visibility on social media in recent years had precipitated. In the process, the public discourse, sometimes unwittingly, took on the negative designation *başıboş* ('stray') when talking about the street dogs in line with the anti-street dog movement's rhetoric.

Besides fierce opposition from parliamentary opposition parties, including right-wing ones like the center-right İYİ Parti (*The Good Party*) and Islamist Saadet Partisi (SP, *Felicity Party*), the proposed changes to the law proved unpopular with the public as well. One KONDA poll conducted in early July through face-to-face interviews with 2579 people put the public support for AKP's final amendment plan as low as 15% (KONDA Araştırma & Danışmanlık, 2024b). In the face of such low approval rates, AKP-friendly media, which includes Turkey's public broadcasting service TRT (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu, *Turkish Radio and Television Corporation*), attempted to garner public support for the proposed changes to the Law[12]. Meanwhile, animal rights organizations lobbied against the law in the parliament and organized protests and rallies against the proposed changes. Despite

[12] As of 2024, 90% of Turkish media outlets is under direct or indirect government control (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). This includes the public broadcaster TRT, which is required to be nonpartisan according to the Turkish constitution. A 2018 poll conducted by the Center for American Progress (CAP) found that 50% of İYİP and HDP and 70% of CHP voters had a "very unfavorable" view of TRT as a news source, while less than 10% of AKP and MHP voters did so (O'Donohue et al., 2020). Notably, the previously mentioned AKP pundit Hilal Kaplan, who had mentioned the so-called "stray dog problem" among the causes of AKP's electoral losses, is also a member of the channel's executive board (TRT Kurumsal, n.d).

the parliamentary and public opposition, and the controversy surrounding the unpopular proposal, the amendments were accepted by the Turkish parliament on 30 July in a 275 to 224 vote (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2024 07 30).

In the following parts, I will first break down the implications of the proposed (and later officialized) amendments to Law #5199, and then discuss the reactions from the political and public opposition. Doing so, I will also touch upon how the anti-street dog framing of the issue was normalized in the mainstream media, including the anti-street dog news reports and propaganda infographics issued by the publicly owned TRT Haber. Finally, analyzing the two public speeches Erdoğan gave to garner support for the amendment to Law #5199, I analyze how the Turkish head of government framed the motivations and implications of the proposed changes.

4.3.1 The original 2004 law and initial plans for amendment

Adopted as a part of Turkey's efforts to align with European Union (EU) standards in late June 2004 and coming into effect on 1 July 2004, Law #5199 on the Protection of Animals was passed by the 22nd Turkish Parliament, in which Erdoğan's AKP enjoyed a supermajority of 363 MPs out of the total 550 after winning the first-ever elections it participated in 2002 (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, 2002; Haspolat, 2019). The adoption of Law #5199 was an important development for animal rights and welfare in Turkey, as it introduced specific measures and regulations for the protection of animals, including establishing Provincial Boards for the Protection of Animals and the recognition of people caring for street animals under the label "local animal care volunteers" for them to be incorporated into the upholding animal welfare at the municipal level (Haspolat, 2019). Most importantly,

the law banned culling and removal practices against street animals, used by municipalities to control the street animal population. Declaring that unowned animals have the right to live as much as owned ones, the original Law #5199 stipulated that municipal administrations must follow animal birth control (ABC), that is, sterilizing or neutering street animals, to control the animal population. Street animals were to be captured by municipalities to be sterilized and then returned to their previous environment, adopting a catch-sterilize-release doctrine (Resmi Gazete, 2004). The law further recognized free-ranging socialized animals living in human settlements without the guardianship of a specific individual or individuals under the label "controlled animal." The adoption of Law #5199 thus put an end to an era of Turkish street dogs (and to a lesser degree, cats) being subjected to unorchestrated eradication campaigns across the country without legal repercussions, and granted a legal status to the country's street animal population, which had previously been unrecognized by law.

However, as noted by Haspolat (2019) and animal welfare activists and NGOs (e.g.; HayKonFed, n.d-a), the catch-sterilize-release doctrine of the original Law #5199 was never strongly enforced. In addition to many municipalities not putting an effort to sterilize animals to control their population, Haspolat (2019) points out that municipalities regularly dismissed local animal care volunteers registered with the municipalities and illegally collected animals off the streets. Municipalities often abandoned the animals they illegally collected in forests or country areas en masse if they did not exterminate them or kept them captivated in shelters, oftentimes in very poor condition and dubbed "death camps" by animal welfare advocates. One notable incident involving illegal extermination of animals in municipal shelters involved a leaked video of two shelter workers systematically

decapitating dogs with a shovel in AKP-run Konya Metropolitan Municipality. Dubbed the "Bloody Shovel Incident" or "Bloody Shovel Scandal," the ensuing investigation and trial of the events only included the two workers captured in the video, without any further investigation of the shelter administration or the municipal government. Treating it as an isolated incident involving the two workers, the court sentenced them to 15 months in prison (Halk TV, 2023; NTV, 2023). The shelter continued to operate as usual.

It was against this background that the drafted plans to amend Law #5199 first went public. The plans published by news outlets would see the complete abandonment of the catch-sterilize-release doctrine, which animal welfare activists and animal care volunteers have long supported and demanded the effective application of it nationwide. The drafted amendments would abolish the legal definition of the "controlled animal" category under which socialized street animals cared for by their community fell and render them "unowned animals," whom the law would stipulate to be relocated into municipal shelters an masse and be put down if not adopted in 30 days (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2024 05 23; Deniz, 2024; Diken, 2024) in line with the the call for the adoption of the so-called England application ('*İngiltere uygulaması'*) which stipulated municipalities to put down unclaimed dogs, as seen in Chapter 3, Section 4.4.1.

Besides emboldening municipalities to be more open about their still-illegal eradication campaigns against street animals, even at this early point of discussions of a possible amendment (Dört Ayaklı Şehir, 2024, 05 03), the news of the government's plans to amend Law #5199 ignited a heated debate within the Turkish public and political spheres. This controversy came amidst ongoing tensions about street dogs, which have been escalating since the emergence of the anti-street dog

movement on social media with the help of possible astroturfing efforts, and reached a peak with the BBP and YRP's overtly anti-street dog campaigns during the campaigning for local elections. In the next section, I will delve into how political actors from the opposition reacted to a potential law amendment as described in news articles and the public opposition to such changes, including organizing protests and rallies.

4.3.2 Public and political reactions against the initial plans

After AKP's plans to amend the law went public in late May, animal rights advocacy groups responded swiftly. Various animal welfare NGOs and advocacy groups called for a protest to be held against any attempts to revamp Law #5199 in a way that would annul the catch-sterilize-release doctrine, the day after the news went out at Istanbul's Beşiktaş Pier, a busy transport hub. This protest was then transformed into a daily vigil held during Istanbul's rush hour when the human traffic around the pier is busiest.

The vigils went on to spread to other cities where they were held in central locations of cities, chiefly in Ankara, İzmir, Adana, and Antalya. Soon after, Ankara's ritualized vigils were moved to the Assembly Park (*Meclis Parkı)*, adjacent to the Turkish Parliament. Rallies were called in major cities, with many provincial cities having at least one public press statement against the law. Figure 26 contains a map illustrating the protests held in Turkish provinces by type:

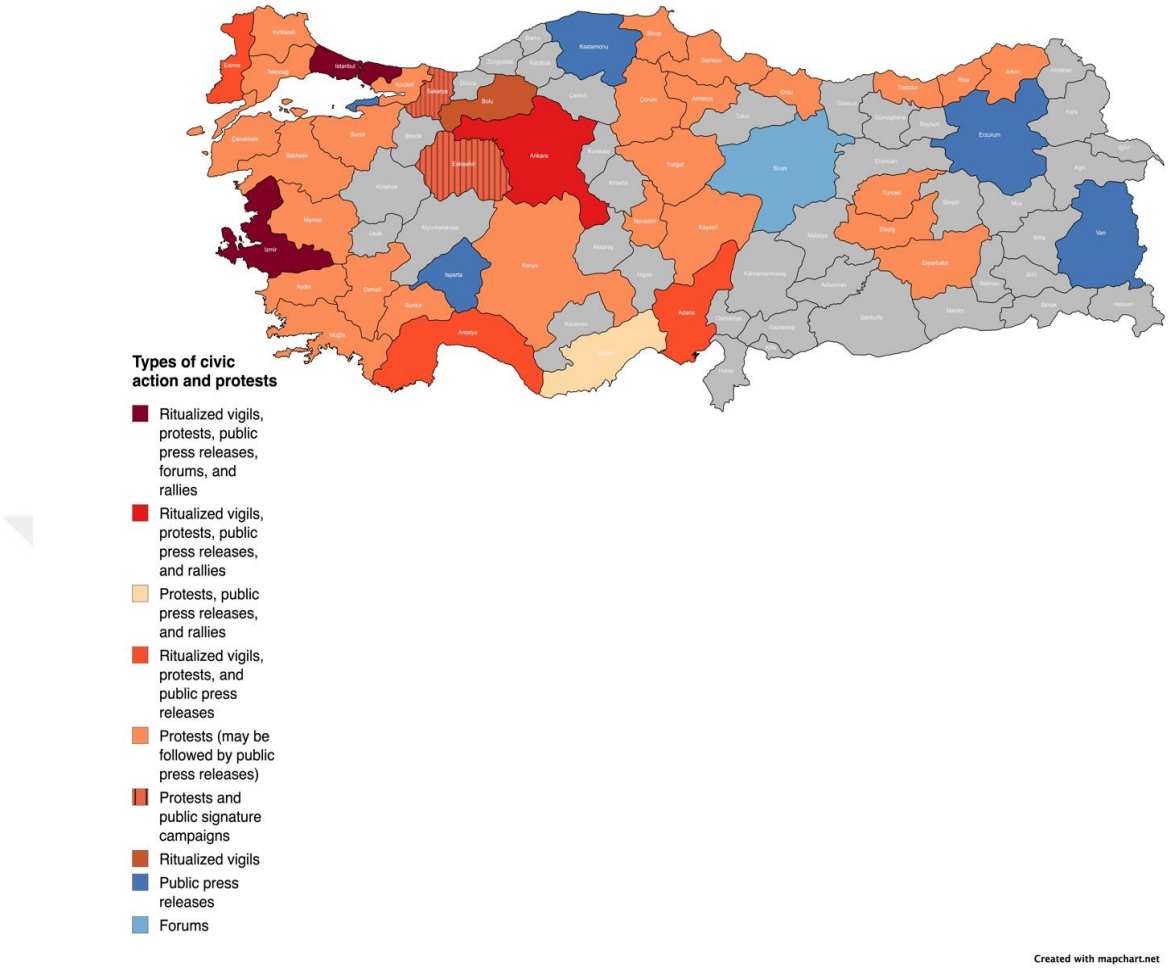

Figure 26. Map of Turkey demonstrating which types of protests were held against the amendment of Law #5199 until July 30th. Data was compiled through social media and local news outlets and may be incomplete

Many professional associations like The Association of Turkish Bars and Turkish Veterinarians' Association denounced the publicized amendment plans and called for the strengthening and reinforcement of Law #5199 based on its original catch-sterilize-release doctrine, both through statements made by their central offices as well as their city charters (Candan, 2024). Turkish Veterinarians' Association further declared that they would not comply with the proposed amendments even if they were to be approved by the parliament, calling the planned amendments

unethical and unscientific (Medyascope Haber Merkezi, 2024a). Many columnists from outlets across the political spectrum, such as the conservative liberal Karar, left-Kemalist Cumhuriyet, and centrist Hürriyet, spoke against the drafted proposal. Artists and intellectuals were quick to speak against a potential amendment as well (e.g., Cumhuriyet Haber Merkezi, 2024). Animal rights advocacy groups like HayKonFed also began lobbying efforts toward every party represented in the parliament, visiting individual MPs to share their reports on the issue and documenting the visits on social media (see HayKonFed, n.d-b).

Besides CHP, İYİ Parti, and pro-Kurdish DEM Parti, another denunciation of the drafted amendments came from YRP, which had participated heavily in the securitization of the existence of street dogs and whose city-level municipalities have been collecting dogs off the streets in Yozgat and Şanlıurfa in breach of the extant version of Law #5199. In a swift statement, YRP leader Fatih Erbakan declared that his party was "against the murder of a single living being" and that they wanted dogs to be kept in good conditions in shelters with 7/24 live camera streaming (Rûdaw Haber Merkezi, 2024). While in line with his party's formal renunciation of culling street animals and pledging to build high-technology animal shelters, Erbakan's declarations were contradicted by the YRP-run Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality's mass killing of dogs unlawfully collected from the streets approximately two weeks later in early June, in response to a rabies quarantine issued in two neighborhoods of the city (Yeşil Gazete Haber Merkezi, 2024a; Yeşil Gazete Haber Merkezi, 2024b). The municipality claimed that it was delivering campaign promises and that the animals carried the risk of rabies, although no report or evidence was shared to support that claim. Several animal welfare and rescue activists visited Şanlıurfa, where they documented the mass killings of dogs and their

burial in makeshift burial sites (HAYTAP, 2024). Animal rescue activist Buket Özgünlü, who managed to rescue several dogs from the Şanlıurfa shelter to her rescue farm in Ankara, was then promptly taken into police custody on the charges of endangering public health by transporting rabid animals after she was targeted on social media by the anti-street dog NGO *Güvenli Sokaklar Derneği* (Safe Streets Association) (Yaşam İçin Yasa İnisiyatifi [@yasamicinyasa], 2024). She was released after no trace of rabies was detected in the rescued dogs. No charges were issued to Şanlıurfa municipal authorities. This incident led animal rights advocates and opposition MPs to question whether the state's inaction in the face of the unlawful killing of animals while punishing rescue volunteers was rooted in the state siding with perpetrators of the massacre (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2024 06 11).

As the drafted proposal ignited widespread public debate around street dogs and the drafted bill itself, the media, as well as political sources, increasingly began labeling street dogs under the anti-street dog movement's framing of *başıboş köpek* (stray dog) instead of the customary designation *sokak köpeği* (street dog), to the degree that even media outlets sympathetic to street dogs and animal welfare activists sometimes adopted the anti-street dog movement's preferred terminology. In the next section, I will delve into the government-controlled media's attempts to build consent for the amendments and examine whether the anti-street dog movement was successful in defining the terms of the debate.

4.3.3 Adoption of anti-street dog terms in the media and the public

As shown in Figure 27, a duplicate of the Google Trends chart presented in Chapter 3, search inquiries for the terms *başıboş köpek* ("stray dog") and *başıboş köpek sorunu* ("stray dog problem") gradually gain traction in the months leading up to

July 2024. However, both continue to lag behind searches for the more conventional and value-neutral term *sokak köpeği* ("street dog").

During the discussions sparked by the initial amendment draft and in the final bill submitted to the Parliament, AKP employed the anti-street dog movement's vocabulary. The Google Trends data suggests that despite a push for a terminology shift, the vocabulary framing street dogs as a security issue requiring action had not taken out traditional vocabulary as of the date of the adoption of the amendment bill. However, the swarming of the new phrase did cause confusion: even media outlets sympathetic to street dogs and animal welfare activists like Fayn (Fayn [@faynstudyo], 2024) sprinkled the label *başıboş* in their content about street animals, although they did give preference to using the term *sokak köpeği* 'street dog'. Some media outlets found themselves using both labels in conjunction, as *başıboş sokak köpekleri* (lit. "stray street dogs"). Other outlets, notably pro-government ones, including Turkey's public broadcaster TRT, stuck to the government's now-preferred anti-street dog framing, *başıboş köpek* 'stray dog.'

Coinciding with the going public of the government's plans to amend Law #5199, TRT's news outlet, TRT Haber, began publishing news articles using the anti-street dog framings *başıboş köpek* 'stray dog' and *mama lobisi* 'kibble lobby' in late May 2024. This content included, but was not limited to, money laundering allegations against animal welfare organizations (branded as the "kibble lobby" by the public broadcaster), claiming that 'stray' dogs were a threat to public sanitation and traffic safety, and increasingly featuring dog violence in the news (Aksan, 2024; Demirhan, 2024; TRT Haber, 2024 05 25, 2024 06 01, 2024 07 18). Most notably, TRT Haber did not use anti-street dog terminology, including *başıboş köpek* 'stray dog,' prior to the Turkish government's announcement of its plans to codify the anti-

street dog movement's demands into law. The public news outlet previously used to opt for neutral and more conventional terminology like *sahipsiz köpek* 'ownerless dog' and *sokak köpeği* 'street dog,' even when reporting news on street dog attacks or street dogs disrupting daily life (e.g.; TRT Haber, 2024 01 12, 2024 02 06, 2024 03 01). This strongly suggests that a coordinated, strategic, and sharp vocabulary shift disseminated by state-run media portrayed street animals as out-of-place animals who needed urgent removal to sway public opinion in favor of the drafted amendments.

Figure 27. Chart created using Google Trends on 30.07.2024. The "Note" label denotes changes that were made in Google's tracking algorithm at the demarcated time.
Blue: "street dog", Red: "stray dog", Orange: "stray dog problem"

Even though media outlets that favor the government pervade Turkey's media landscape (Akşer & Baybars, 2024; Newman et al., 2024), both Google Trends data and opinion polling results suggest that neither the anti-street dog framing nor the support for the proposed legislative changes had gained momentum among the Turkish public (KONDA Araştırma & Danışmanlık, 2024b) even as the AKP pushed the final amendment bill through the parliament. The following section features a breakdown of the final amendment bill for Law #5199.

4.3.4 Final bill for amending Law #5199 and its implications

In the face of the public, political, and intra-party (T24, 2024b; Hançerigüzel, 2024) opposition to AKP's initial amendment drafts, the party announced that it had revised its original proposal, claiming a compromise that would satisfy every faction of the street dog debate had been achieved (Medyascope Haber Merkezi, 2024b; Yeşil Gazete Haber Merkezi, 2024b).

The final amendment bill proposed to the parliament in early July signaled a reversal from the "English application" of the first amendment plans, which would stipulate that every ownerless dog be put down if not adopted within 30 days. However, despite high-ranking AKP members' claims in televised debates that well-socialized dogs would not be relocated into shelters or be put down (Yeşil Gazete Haber Merkezi, 2024b), the final amendment bill still stipulated that municipalities collect every street dog (referred to in the bill as *sahipsiz* 'unowned') and place them in shelters. After their stipulated relocation into shelters, which most municipalities completely lacked or kept in very poor condition, "dangerous" and sickly dogs would be immediately put down, and the remaining ones would be sterilized. The catch-sterilize-release doctrine was to be abandoned as the sterilized dogs were not

to be returned to their initial environments. The amendments would still allow municipalities to put down healthy and well-socialized animals under vague pretexts such as "public health concerns" or "controlling the animal population." In other words, the revised amendment plans continued to provide legal grounds for municipalities to indiscriminately cull animals. The bill foresaw up to 2 years' imprisonment for municipal administrators failing to comply with the law. In line with the outlined amendments, the amendment bill also abolished the clause on the recognition and endorsement of unowned animals' right to live, and abolished the "Animal Care Volunteer" designation, with which municipalities were to cooperate under the 2004 law. The amended law would recognize only "owned" and "ownerless" animals, abolishing the "controlled animal" designation under which street animals fell.

As the Justification section of the amendment bill stated, the overarching goal of the restructuring of the law was to eliminate the dog population living in the streets, which it called a threat to human life and public hygiene, as well as being detrimental to Turkey's national image. The bill stated that the catch-sterilize-release method was inherently flawed and was not commonly applied throughout the world, especially in the West, noting that it is used in "India and certain Balkan countries." Pointing out that some countries euthanize ownerless animals after 7 days and a culling edict had been previously issued by the Turkish government in 1932,[13] it claimed that the catch-sterilize-release method and ABC procedures failed to control the animal population in Turkey, necessitating their abandonment in favor of a more universally applied and cost-efficient procedure (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi TBMM

[13] Anti-street dog tweets, as well as BBP leader Destici, had also alluded to the early Republican culling edict to legitimize contemporary action against street dogs. See Chapter 2, Section 4.4.1.

Grup Başkanlığı, 2024). The bill made no mention of the government and state's poor enforcement of the original 2004 law AKP itself had sponsored, or the limited number and abysmal quality of municipal shelters. Alluding to concerns of ensuring public order and preventing zoonotic diseases, the bill presented Turkey's street animal population, for which it uses the term *başıboş köpekler,* "stray dogs," along with designations like *sahipsiz hayvan,* "unowned animal," as an indication of Turkey's underdevelopment vis-à-vis European countries.

The leading party of the 2024 local elections and the country's main parliamentary opposition party CHP, whose leader Özgür Özel had compared the initial amendment plans to the notorious Hayırsızada massacre of the late Ottoman Empire, announced that they would not enforce the law in municipalities they controlled (Hançerigüzel, 2024; also see Chapter 2). Instead, Özel promised to increase the number of shelters in CHP municipalities and to escalate sterilization campaigns. Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP mayor of Turkey's biggest city, Istanbul, also spoke against the law, pointing out the lack of enforcement for the original 2004 law and calling the amendment plans "untenable" and inhumane (Hançerigüzel, 2024; Dünya Gazetesi, 2024). Notwithstanding the ongoing strong political and public opposition, the proposed amendment bill was sent to the relevant parliamentary committee, after which it would be sent to the general assembly for a final vote.

4.3.5 Parliamentary proceedings and Erdoğan's rhetoric

The committee proceedings for the amendment bill saw unusually intense and publicized debates, as well as physical violence (Bayır, 2024a; Köylü, 2024a). The initial committee meeting on the amendment proposal began amidst a rally against

the bill in the adjacent Assembly Park, and the opposition MPs' objections to the AKP committee chair for not letting representatives from animal welfare NGOs into the committee salon. Parliamentary security detail battered NGO representatives and activists waiting to view and join the proceedings in the assembly hall, while police attacked the rally in the Assembly Park. When the committee chair ignored the objections and gave the floor to an AKP MP, the opposition protested by hitting their desks to no avail.

The speaking AKP MP claimed without evidence that the ownerless dog population would "reach 60 million" if an intervention foreseen in the amendment is not made (Bayır, 2024a). The floor was then given to a mother whose son was reportedly fatally hit by a car while running away from street dogs. The mother directly attacked the opposition MPs, saying that they were responsible for her child's death. When an opposition MP argued the government's failure to enforce the existing law was responsible for the child's death, the mother threw her son's shoe at the MP, after which she was removed from the room (Bayır, 2024a; Köylü, 2024a). Opposition MPs once again objected that while specialists and activists critical of the bill they invited were barred from the proceedings, testimony supporting the amendment was selectively permitted. Nevertheless, the committee was adjourned after the three clauses of the amendment bill were accepted.

The second meeting of the committee began with the AKP MP committee chair's proposal limiting the talk times of committee and non-committee member MPs, as well as how many MPs from parties not represented in the committee could take the floor. The proposal was accepted by AKP and MHP votes. Notwithstanding the talk time restrictions, the meeting lasted for more than 30 hours. The governing AKP-MHP block faced unanimous opposition from members and visiting MPs from

other parties, including the conservative Islamist Saadet Party (*Felicity Party*) (Bayır, 2024b). Opposition MPs repeatedly pointed out the AKP government's neglect in enforcing the original law it sponsored. The opposition bloc further argued that the amendments under debate are unconstitutional, and that the bill's wording is vague at points, open to interpretation as stipulating the removal of and enabling the culling of street cats as well. AKP members of the committee then submitted an ad hoc proposal for the clause stipulating the relocation of animals into shelters to refer specifically to dogs (Bayır, 2024c).

An AKP MP defended the amendment bill referring to the early Republican government edict ordering the culling of the ownerless dogs. The edict, which was also alluded to in the bill's justification section as well as being used frequently by anti-street dog posters on Twitter/X and BBP leader Destici alike, stipulated the culling of the ownerless dogs by poisoning or shooting. The AKP MP further stated that "Atatürk says no *stray* animal can exist in a modern city. He says that street animals are culled," to which opposition MPs argued that veterinary science has "developed past that" in the past 90 years (Köylü, 2024b). Another AKP MP attacked opposition MPs asking "whether they planned to get their votes from the dogs" (Bayır, 2024d), implying that he believed the amendment bill was what their constituents wanted.

The bill was approved with the votes of the AKP-MHP bloc and forwarded to the general assembly for the final vote on July 23, 2024. Animal welfare NGO representatives, specialists, and activists were not allowed into the assembly hall during the second meeting of the committee. On July 24, 2024, President and AKP Chairman Erdoğan delivered an incendiary speech in support of the amendment bill as it was waiting for a final vote in the general assembly. In this speech, Erdoğan

claimed that Turkey had a “stray dog problem” unseen in any “civilized” country in the world (Özgenç, 2024). Arguing that ownerless dogs had become an uncontrollable source of traffic accidents, rabies cases, and dog attacks, he claimed, employing anti-street dog movement rhetoric, that “[our] nation wants this problem to be solved. [It] wants the streets to become safe.” Further commenting on the opposition to the bill, he stated that “nobody dare to lecture us about compassion” and criticized the opponents to the amendments for not raising their voice for the Kurdish insurgent militia PKK’s “massacring of babies in crib” or “the death of up to 16 thousand innocent children” in Gaza, referring to the ongoing Israeli operation in the region (Özgenç, 2024). He further signaled that the amendment bill would be pushed through the assembly so that it could go into effect before the end of the legislative year. In line with this, the general assembly meeting on the amendment bill was scheduled for the following Sunday, July 28, 2024, during which the parliament usually would not be in session, and the parliament was closed to visitors (Serbestiyet, 2024a).

After a general assembly lasting two days, the amendments were passed by the parliament around midnight on July 30, 2024, in a 275 to 224 vote. The general assembly debates on the bill saw passionate speeches against the amendments from the opposition MPs, as well as some opposition MPs protesting AKP MPs wearing white gloves with red paint resembling bloody hands (Serbestiyet, 2024b). The main opposition party, CHP, took the law to Turkey’s Constitutional Court, seeking that the amendments be struck down.

Following the bill’s passing, some municipalities began collecting street dogs to relocate them into shelters without waiting for the presidential signature and the law’s publication in the Official Gazette (*Resmi Gazete*), which is necessary under

Turkish law for a bill to come into effect (Ağar, 2024). Lawyers, veterinarians, and animal welfare activists pointed out that well-socialized and elderly dogs would be the first ones affected by this “massacre law” (Öztürk, 2024).

Figure 28. AKP and MHP MPs in favor of the bill having their "souvenir photo" taken after the vote
(Serbestiyet, 2024b)

With the passing of the amendment bill, Turkey’s anti-street dog movement succeeded in codifying its demands into law, and what had begun as an alt-right discourse on Twitter/X succeeded in influencing legislation. In the following section, I will recapitulate and discuss the chapter’s findings and arguments.

4.4 Conclusion and discussion

This chapter has examined how Turkey's anti-street dog movement, initially a fringe alt-right discourse, was elevated from the margins of Twitter/X to the center of Turkish legislative politics. Through analyzing party manifestos, electoral outcomes, media sources, and parliamentary proceedings, I have shown that this transformation was not rooted in popular demand or empirical policy necessity, but in an act of political overcorrection following the AKP's historic local election defeat in March 2024.

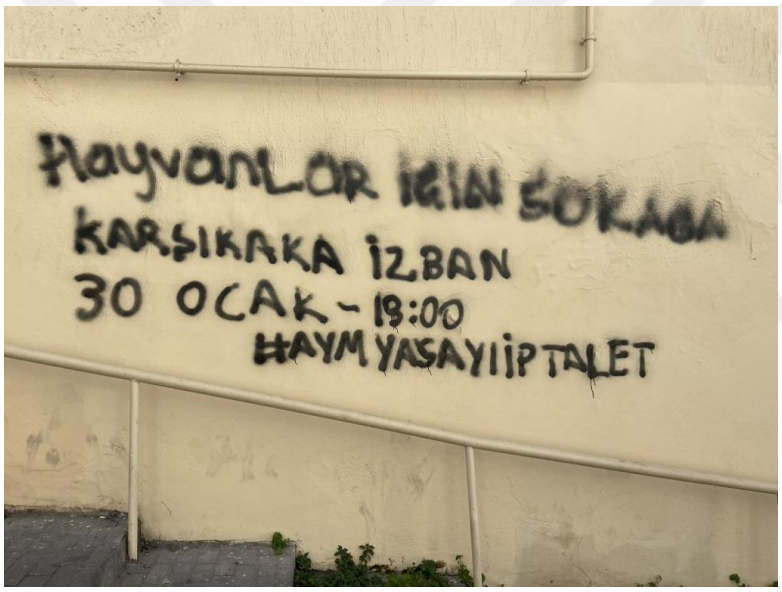

Figure 29. Wall painting announcing a post-amendment animal rights rally in Konak, İzmir: "To the streets for the animals." Taken in February 2025 by the author

The findings of this chapter – and more broadly, this study – demonstrate that minor far-right political parties acted as mediators who translated alt-right discourse generated and circulated on social media into institutional political discourse, and following a set of developments outlined through this study, mainstream politics. The findings also indicate a lack of social media literacy among government members, prominent party members, lawmakers, and potentially their advisors: the

increased visibility of anti-street dog rhetoric and, more broadly, the debate surrounding street dogs seems to have signaled AKP lawmakers and policy advisors the existence of a public demand for removal of street dogs from the streets. However, as pointed out through this chapter, reliable opinion polling demonstrates strong opposition to the amendments among the public, and no trustworthy report indicating increased street dog violence or population has been made public.

Despite organized and widespread public opposition and a public unconvinced that the street dogs constituted a crisis of public order, the governing AKP-MHP bloc managed to secure legislative change through strong-arming the public and political opposition alike. This is typical of competitive authoritarian regimes such as Turkey, where the alignment of political elites is more indicative of policy direction than public demand or expert consensus (see Yabancı, 2018).

The widespread government control of Turkish media also aimed to portray an atmosphere of broad public consensus around the securitization of street dogs to a largely unconvinced public. Most notably, the sharp terminological shift and increase in securitizing content in the state-run news outlet TRT Haber highlights an active campaign to sway public opinion against street dogs, aiming to garner selection bias in the audience.

The legislative history of street animals in Turkey highlights the country's broader structural problems regarding the rule of law. Even before the 2024 amendments were proposed and passed, municipalities had been collecting street dogs in violation of the extant version of Law #5199, which mandated sterilization and return rather than removal and/or culling. This practice was not only tolerated but increasingly normalized, culminating in President Erdoğan himself calling in December 2021 for municipalities to collect ownerless dogs off the streets despite

his party being the original sponsor of the 2004 law outlawing such measures. These examples point to a broader political environment where legal frameworks and the well-being of living beings are routinely subordinated to short-term political goals. The amendment process outlined in this chapter also served as the retroactive legalization of already widespread unlawful practices committed by municipal administrations.

The adoption of the amendments to Law #5199 marked Turkey's *de jure* shift from an animal care regime in which – notwithstanding the highly unsatisfactory enforcement of the law – street animals' *modus vivendi* was recognized and protected to one that necessitates domesticated animals to live under the guardianship of specific individual or individuals or to not exist at all. More importantly, while its relocation clauses were later modified to strictly target dogs, the amendments to Law #5199 abolished the catch-sterilize-release doctrine for cats and dogs alike – dismantling an already fragile and inadequately enforced framework of urban animal welfare.

This chapter has therefore analyzed and discussed the anti-street dog movement's legislative success following its co-optation by far-right parties, presenting the last part of this case study. The following Conclusion chapter will discuss the study's overarching findings and implications, as well as its limitations and possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION:

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE "MASSACRE LAW"

This study has analyzed the anti-street dog movement as it emerged online as an alt-right discourse and was gradually co-opted, initially by far-right parties, and eventually Turkey's governing right-wing Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), resulting in their reversal of the animal welfare provisions they themselves initially codified in 2004. Chapter 2 pointed out the lacuna regarding street animals in Human-Animal Studies (HAS) and its more critically aligned fraction, Critical Animal Studies (CAS). Arguing that this gap in the HAS/CAS literature is an indication of a wider epistemological bias stemming from the lack of widespread populations of street animals in Western countries, the chapter concluded with a call to scholars aligning themselves with HAS/CAS fields to produce academic knowledge on the politics of existence surrounding the *modus vivendi* of street animals.

Concurring with this call for a new agenda for CAS/HAS scholars, Chapter 3 established a timeline of Turkey's anti-street dog movement and analyzed its online participant profile through Twitter/X data. The analysis found that the anti-street dog posters on Twitter/X were overwhelmingly male (81.5%), and that there is a significant overlap between users posting tweets with anti-street dog sentiment and those posting anti-feminist sentiment in support of the annulment of Law #6284 *On Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women.* The frequency analyses conducted in the chapter found that anti-street dog sentiment is presented through moralizing, securitizing, and populist rhetoric. Moreover, the chapter has

found strong evidence for the artificial amplification of anti-street dog tweets. Chapter 3 argued that the anti-street dog movement operated through the affective and discursive logics of the alt-right: the securitizing of an issue by an overwhelmingly male and nationalist-conservative base, algorithmic amplification, symbolic threat construction, and populist binary framing.

The following Chapter 4 builds on these findings by examining how this alt-right discourse was co-opted by minor far-right parties in the lead-up to the 2024 local elections, and how its agenda ultimately entered the Turkish political mainstream through the AKP's post-election decision to strategically adopt the securitization of street dogs into the party's platform. Building on the digital patterns analyzed in the previous chapter, it documented how minor far-right parties (notably YRP and BBP) adopted and mainstreamed anti-street dog rhetoric in their electoral campaigns, eventually pressuring the ruling AKP to legislate the movement's demands following its 2024 local election defeat. Despite minimal public support and widespread opposition from civil society, expert bodies, and opposition parties, the AKP and its governing partner, MHP, pushed the amendments to Law #5199 *on the Protection of Animals* through parliament, aided by securitizing media discourse and the state's competitive authoritarian structure. This process involved a sharp rhetorical shift, evident in party manifestos, Turkish public broadcaster TRT's news coverage, and Erdoğan's speeches, that sought to reframe street dogs as an urgent public security crisis, allowing for the legal abandonment of the catch-sterilize-release policy in favor of mass relocation of street dogs into shelters and their potential culling. The chapter argues that the AKP elite's consensus, not popular demand, drove the amendment, and that the resulting legislation retroactively legitimized municipal practices previously illegal under the poorly enforced original

2004 version of the law. Ultimately, the anti-street dog movement succeeded not by mobilizing the public but by creating the illusion of public support via social media visibility and embedding its discourse within political agendas – demonstrating how an alt-right movement shaped state policy under an authoritarian regime.

After this outline of the thesis chapters, I will now discuss the implications and the limitations of the study, as well as possible directions future research may take, in the following sections.

5.1 Limitations and directions for future research

This study has primarily constructed a narrative of Turkey's anti-street dog movement as a case of alt-right discourse gaining mainstream traction in the aftermath of key political and social developments. While I stand by this framing and argue that it provides a valid and analytically powerful lens, it captures only one dimension of a multifaceted phenomenon. Future research could expand the scope by exploring the biopolitical and developmentalist dimensions of anti-street dog sentiment more extensively.

Although this thesis identifies the movement as an alt-right one, it does not delve into the internal dynamics of how this discourse is organized, produced, and disseminated. The alt-right label does not imply that all anti-street dog discourse originates from coordinated ideological centers: as I have examined elsewhere (Yolcu, in press), such discourse can also be produced authentically at the grassroots level, as well as being produced top-down by organized actors such as the anti-street dog NGO *Güvenli Sokaklar Derneği* (Safe Streets Association). This multiplicity in the levels of production, grassroots and institutional, and the potential interplay or antagonisms between them, deserves further investigation. This is especially

important given that a defining feature of alt-right discourse is its capacity to circulate beyond conventional far-right circles and appeal to individuals who do not necessarily identify with right-wing or inegalitarian ideologies.

A key methodological limitation of this study is its reliance on the textual content of Twitter/X posts to assess the online dissemination of anti-street dog sentiment. Again, as I have highlighted elsewhere regarding the anti-street dog sentiment (Yolcu, in press), visual and memetic internet content play a considerable role in shaping public affect, embodying caricaturized tropes representing different groups and inciting audiences to identify with the standpoint of the content creator. Future research should consider incorporating qualitative or mixed-method approaches that allow for the analysis of visual and affective content.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, funding limitations necessitated that the social media data used in this study be sourced through Koç University's POLITUS project corpus. Since I did not have direct access to the corpus, I was unable to conduct a network analysis that could have mapped the dissemination and amplification of anti-street dog sentiment or identified overlapping social media networks producing other anti-egalitarian and reactionary discourses. While the findings in Chapter 3 establish a connection between anti-feminist, anti-Istanbul Convention posters and those promoting anti-street dog discourse on Twitter/X, future research would benefit from a methodology that extensively traces the structure and reach of intersecting alt-right networks.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Implications on party strategies and elite co-optation

Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, its implications are significant. Most crucially, the findings clearly indicate that alt-right-originated and far-right-co-opted anti-street dog movement is deeply entangled with anti-LGBTQ sentiment and anti-feminist discourse. This alignment is evident not only in the results of the frequency analysis in Chapter 3 but also in the discursive juxtapositions found in party manifestos and the broader ideological positions of political actors who champion the movement, like the YRP. YRP's 2024 electoral campaign aimed to frame the right-wing AKP government's shortcomings as the result of its lack of due adherence to Islamic morality. When considered in juxtaposition with their swift declaration against the proposed initial amendments to Law #5199, despite their staunchly anti-street dog stance, it would not be far-fetched to argue that the far-right party co-opted the anti-street dog discourse readily available online to differentiate itself from AKP on the right side of the political spectrum. While the party's electoral manifesto did oppose the culling of street dogs and proposed the creation of high-tech animal shelters with constant public oversight, this component of their platform was not highlighted, if mentioned at all, in their actual campaign. Instead, the party aggressively emphasized its promise to "clean the streets" of dogs. This selective emphasis suggests that the YRP strategically instrumentalized the issue to appeal to a reactionary electorate along with its anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ positions, rather than offering a coherent policy on animal control.

What enabled the anti-street dog movement, at least partially until every single street dog is collected off the country's streets, to reach its political goals was not popular support but rather elite co-optation (Holdo, 2019) and political party

linkage mechanisms (Blings, 2018). As in other cases of far-right discourse entering mainstream politics, once-fringe anti-street dog actors did not succeed by winning over mass public opinion, but by infiltrating or coordinating with sympathetic political parties that served as legitimizing intermediaries. Much like Germany's ethnonationalist and xenophobic Identitarian Movement, which used a network of low-level online activists and alternative media to spread its inflammatory messaging before being enmeshed into the platform of the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland, *Alternative for Germany*) (Klinger et al., 2023), Turkey's anti-street dog discourse found institutional expression through the electoral programs and campaign rhetoric of minor far-right parties like YRP and BBP. These parties functioned as mediators of alt-right discourse into party politics**,** absorbing the extremist framings circulating on social media, such as labeling street dogs as domestic security threats and delegitimizing those who care for street animals, while sanitizing their origins to present them as legitimate public policy concerns. Once these discourses were framed within a broader narrative of a security crisis, the AKP was able to appropriate them when it seemed feasible, aligning with the securitizing rhetoric while avoiding direct association with the more overtly extremist framings like *mama lobisi* 'kibble lobby' to an extent.

This dynamic reflects what the social movements literature describes as the mainstreaming effect of far-right discourse (e.g., Downes, 2020), where traditional parties adopt radical themes to recover voters or redirect blame, chiefly after electoral defeats. In this case, AKP's post-2024 electoral downturn created a moment of political vulnerability and recalibration, evident in the party leader and President Erdoğan's calls for "autocritique." However, the specific steps the party took to amend Law #5199 were not a response to genuine public demand: as polling

data shows, street dogs ranked among the least urgent issues for voters, and the proposed amendment plans were heavily opposed. Rather, it was a case of elite misreading or strategic instrumentalization of an initially digital and then far-right discourse, interpreting its online visibility and its perceived role in the election results as a sign of popular mandate. In competitive authoritarian regimes like Turkey, where the media is heavily controlled by the government and policymaking processes depend more on political elites' consensus than democratic deliberation or expert opinion, such dynamics can be especially pronounced. Government-aligned media, including the state-run TRT Haber, played a key role in expanding the Overton Window, adopting anti-street dog terminology after AKP publicly committed to a legislative change, offering legitimacy to a rhetoric once outside of the scope of acceptable mainstream political discourse (Wright, n.a) – a key goal of alt-right movements (Hawley, 2019). What may appear as a sharp policy shift is therefore, in fact, a result of strategic political elite co-optation and political party linkage.

5.2.2 Speciecide in the aftermath of the "Massacre Law" and CHP's complicity

Animal welfare activists and NGOs, who have dubbed the 2024 amendments to Law #5199 "the massacre law," have framed the ensuing violence against Turkey's street dogs as a genocide. In this context, I propose the term speciecide –the systematic extermination of a species – as an analytical frame. The amendment's adoption catalyzed not only the removal of dogs from urban areas into shelters with poor conditions but also unleashed a wave of state- and citizen-led violence, targeting not only street animals themselves but also the humans who care for them.

Shortly after the law's adoption, instances of violence against animals and their caretakers proliferated. A man who killed an unowned puppy with a pitchfork in August 2024 defended his actions by stating that "the state has proclaimed a law to kill the dogs" (T24, 2024c). Individuals caring for street animals are increasingly assaulted (e.g.; DHA, 2024; Özgür Kocaeli, 2025). Most disturbingly, an elderly woman's home was set on fire after she was targeted by the aforementioned anti-street dog NGO *Güvenli Sokaklar Derneği*; she had been filmed objecting to the collection of the dogs she cared for (Medyascope Haber Merkezi, 2025). The fire resulted in her death.

Several municipalities, including but not limited to AKP-run Niğde province as well as Ankara's Altındağ and Kocaeli's Gebze municipalities, conducted mass killings of dogs, and at least in Gebze's case, cats (Boran, 2024a, 2024b). These killings occurred not through medically induced euthanasia as stipulated in the amended law but through extralegal methods: ketamine overdoses, asphyxiation in plastic bags, and physical violence akin to the notorious Konya shelter shovel killings. Niğde's provincial administration defended itself by claiming that its actions had been "in line with law and public conscience" (NTV Haber, 2024). Activists and local caretakers of street animals reported that many of the dogs found in these makeshift mass graves were well-socialized and trusting towards humans – precisely the animals experts warned would be most vulnerable under the new law (Öztürk, 2024).

Despite promises by the main opposition party, CHP, to resist the amendment and its subsequent legal challenge at the Constitutional Court, its compliance with the amended law (or its lack thereof) has been mixed at best. Several CHP-run municipalities, including the metropolitan municipalities of Ankara and İzmir, have

participated in the mass relocation of dogs to shelters, and in the case of Ankara's Mamak municipality, the culling of dogs relocated into municipal shelters in abysmal condition, where dogs reportedly resorted into eating one another due to starvation (Medyascope Haber Merkezi, 2024c; Evrensel, 2025). CHP's complicity with the aptly dubbed "massacre law," whether due to bureaucratic inertia in municipal animal control departments, legal pressure from central administration, or political calculations; signals a failure of the party to uphold its promise of not applying the amended law and increasing the intensity of sterilization campaigns and shelter conditions, leading to accusations of hypocrisy by animal welfare groups (Evrensel, 2025).

It should be noted that while pressure from the central administration may partially explain why CHP-led municipalities have begun complying with the amended law by collecting street dogs, it does not excuse the appalling shelter conditions observed in places like Mamak, nor the reported killing of elderly, well-socialized street dogs due to the irresponsible use of anesthetics by municipal workers in Ankara's long-time CHP stronghold, Çankaya (Yılmaz, 2025). At best, such incidents point to CHP's failure to coordinate and enforce a coherent municipal policy on street animals among the local administrations it controls.

Figure 30: Mural for killed street dog Tobby in front of CHP-controlled Çankaya Municipality in Ankara. The cardboard sign says: “I’m not sleeping, I was killed.” Another sign in the back partly reads “Murderer CHP, collaborator…”. Tobby was reportedly sleeping at a park when municipal workers swooped down on him for relocation. Via Yılmaz, 2025.

5.2.3 On the representativeness of social media

As noted throughout this study, there are clear indications that AKP officials interpreted the visibility of anti-street dog discourse on social media as evidence of widespread public support, especially when juxtaposed with the electoral gains of far-right parties that campaigned on the issue. This points to a bigger issue regarding the social media literacy of the members of the political elite at large. Exemplified by the AKP MP’s rebuttal of the opposition, asking if they were planning to get their votes from the dogs, reveals a tendency among high-ranking officials to treat platforms like Twitter/X as digital agoras or town halls, rather than algorithm-driven platforms optimized to maximize user interaction and retention. Even when the possibility of artificial or algorithmic manipulation is set aside, the demographic

profile of Twitter/X users remains inherently unrepresentative of that of the broader public: according to the data from the POLITUS Corpus, ~71% of all individual users in the Turkish Twitterosphere are male, and only ~29% are female.

The unrepresentative gender distribution among Twitter/X users, heavily skewed towards male representation, is sufficient by itself to discredit the platform as a trustworthy proxy to observe public opinion. Moreover, the inherent gender imbalance among the Turkish Twitter/X users notwithstanding, it is worth reiterating here that both the anti-street dog discourse and the broader discussion surrounding street dogs on the platform were found to be even more male-dominated. These findings further challenge the trite common-sensical perception that social media serves as a reliable indicator of public sentiment.

5.3 Conclusion

This study has analyzed Turkey's anti-street dog movement using a mixed-methods approach integrating computational analysis of social media data and qualitative-interpretive analysis. Doing so, the study works towards filling the important epistemological gap it highlights in Chapter 2 regarding street animals in Human-Animal Studies and Critical Animal Studies. Moreover, it illuminates the opportunities and mechanisms that enabled a once-fringe digital social movement to influence national legislation, and most importantly, offers insight into how the alt-right manifests itself beyond Western societies despite generally being analyzed as a Western phenomenon. What unfolded around Turkey's street dogs is not merely a local controversy, it carries the blueprints of a global phenomenon: even the most marginal issues can become powerful vehicles of reactionary politics. As social scientists, we must take these margins seriously, now more so than ever.

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