Media Representation of National Identities in Divided Societies: The Turkish-Cypriot Media
Coverage of the 2023 Presidential Election in the Republic of Cyprus

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# Abstract

This research investigates the representation of the Greek-Cypriot 2023 presidential elections in Turkish-Cypriot news media. In doing so it examines the impacts of media on national identity and peace-building in divided societies. By conducting a thematic analysis of five prominent Turkish-Cypriot newspapers, the study explores how media representations and discourses contribute to the construction of national identities and their implications for peace-building efforts. The research recognizes the pivotal role of media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards identity and conflict. Through a qualitative analysis of news articles and opinion pieces, the study identifies recurring themes and narratives related to media representation and national identity in the Cypriot media landscape. The findings reveal that media outlets in Cyprus play a significant role in reinforcing and perpetuating nationalist narratives and divisions. National identity is often portrayed in dichotomous terms, emphasizing the differences between Greek speaking Cypriots and Turkish speaking Cypriots while downplaying shared historical and cultural elements. However, the analysis also uncovers instances where the media demonstrates a more nuanced approach, providing space for dialogue, understanding, and alternative perspectives. These instances of constructive journalism offer glimpses of how media can contribute to peace-building by promoting inclusive narratives, challenging stereotypes, and fostering empathy among the communities.

**Keywords:** Cypriot national identity, media representation, divided societies, thematic analysis, peace-building

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# Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Expansion |
|---|---|
| TC | Turkish Cypriot |
| GC | Greek Cypriot |
| TsC | Turkish speaking Cypriot |
| GsC | Greek speaking Cypriot |
| TRNC | Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus |
| RoC | Republic of Cyprus |
| AKEL | Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού/Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú (Progressive Party of Working People) |
| ELAM | Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο/Ethniko Laiko Metopo (National People's Front) |
| DISY | Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός/Dimokratikós Sinagermós (Democratic Rally) |
| DIKO | Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα/Dimokratikó Kómma (Democratic Party) |
| EDEK | Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών, romanized: Kinima Sosialdimokraton (Movement for Social Democracy) |
| DIPA | Δημοκρατική Παράταξη, Dimokratiki Parataxi (Democratic Alignment) |
| TAK | Türk Ajansı Kıbrıs (Turkish Agency Cyprus) |

# 1. Introduction

For more than five decades, the island of Cyprus has been entrenched in a prolonged state of conflict. This conflict is characterized as intractable due to its seemingly insolvable nature (Adamides, 2020). The island's tumultuous history, including periods of colonial rule and inter-communal violence, and eventual de-facto division has profoundly influenced the social fabric and political dynamics of the region. Nonetheless, rigorous efforts have been made by the leaders of both communities (Greek speaking Cypriot (GsC) and Turkish speaking Cypriot (TsC)), as well as international organizations and primarily the United Nations, to facilitate the reunification of the island (Bölükbaşi, 1998). However, the effectiveness of these organizations and the genuineness of politicians' endeavors are subjects of ongoing debate (Doyle & Sambanis, 2011). Notably, journalism and media play a critical role in shaping the narratives surrounding peace initiatives and national identity in the island (Şahin, 2022). Thus, the depiction of the other and in particular of GsC presidential candidates in TC (Turkish Cypriot) newspapers, especially within the realm of online media, constitutes a salient issue within the political landscape of the country and is worth investigating.

With the exponential advancement of technology and the pervasive utilization of the internet, digital newspapers have emerged as a pivotal channel of information for a significant proportion of the populace (Newman et al., 2022). The Reuters Digital News Report reveals that, in the majority of nations, more than 35% of individuals rely on their smartphones as their primary source for accessing news upon waking (Newman et al., 2022). In this context, the role of online media in divided societies becomes a critical aspect to explore and understand.

In divided societies, the media plays a critical role in shaping collective identity and influencing attitudes towards the "other." News media constructs narratives and frames national discourses that contribute to a shared sense of identity among the population. It can serve as a powerful tool for fostering national unity, building common understanding, and promoting peace-building efforts. However, the influence of the media is not without its challenges. In many cases, media practices can perpetuate stereotypes, disseminate false information, and reinforce prejudices, exacerbating conflicts and divisions within divided societies. In the context of Cyprus, media construction of collective identity has further intensified the "us" versus "them" narrative, hindering the development of a collective Cypriot consciousness (Şahin, 2011). The media, particularly in times of conflict or tension,

tends to accentuate the differences between communities and highlight grievances, contributing to a sense of distrust and animosity (Lieberman & Miller, 2021). These media practices can reinforce existing divisions and make reconciliation and peace-building efforts more challenging and give them the appearance of being out of reach.

In view of the above this thesis asked and addressed the following inter-related research questions: *"How did the Turkish-Cypriot media represent the 2023 Greek-Cypriot Presidential elections?"* In pursuit of this aim, the study will investigate also the following sub-question," *How and in what ways was national identity represented in the TC media coverage of the 2023 Greek-Cypriot Presidential elections and what implications does this have for peace-building?"*

In summary, the representation of presidential candidates in Cypriot newspapers constitutes a pivotal aspect of the country's political landscape. By exploring these facets, a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics of media representation and its profound influences can be attained. The presidential elections encompassed two rounds: the first being on February 5, 2023, followed by a second round on February 12, 2023, as none of the candidates secured more than 50% of the votes. The four candidates who garnered support from parliamentary parties were Andreas Mavroyiannis backed by left-wing AKEL and Generation Change, Averof Neofytou supported by right-wing DISY, Christos Christou supported by the far-right ELAM and Nikos Christodoulides running independently with support from DIKO, EDEK, DIPA, Solidarity Movement, and Animal Party Cyprus. It is within this specific time-frame that the examination will be focused. It must be noted that throughout this research the terms Turkish Cypriot (TC) and Turkish speaking Cypriot (TsC) as well as Greek Cypriot (GC) and Greek speaking Cypriot (GsC) will be used interchangeably. When possible Turkish speaking Cypriot (TsC) and Greek speaking Cypriot (GsC) will be used as this language is less divisive and distinguishes the communities based simply on the language they speak.

The following sections will discuss the implications of media in peace-building efforts and the formation of national identity, particularly the concept of Cypriotness. Additionally, the section will examine different media effects and review the existing representation of Greek-speaking Cypriots (GsC) in Turkish Cypriot (TC) news media, as well as the structure of TC news media.

## 1.1 Media Representation and Media Effects

Media representation has a highly influential role in shaping our understanding of the world, through influencing our attitudes and beliefs. The power of media representation lies in a few channels such as constructing narratives, framing issues, and shaping public opinion. Given the significant influence of media representation it has the potential to perpetuate stereotypes or challenge them, which can contribute to narratives about identity and also peace-building. Through the use of framing and agenda-setting media representation is able to influence perceptions of social issues and debates (Borah, 2016). Media often perpetuates existing narratives through recurring characterizations, language, and tone. Language and tone within news media are a topic of ongoing debate. Their impacts have been outlined by a number of authors (Carroll & McCombs, 2003), ranging from the impacts of negative tone on polarization (Wu & Shen, 2020) to the use of evaluative tone and its impacts on individual perception (Kepplinger et al. 1989).

Moreover, digital newspapers wield an increasingly prominent role in shaping public opinion, given their expansive reach and constant accessibility. Empowered with the capability to instantaneously distribute news and information, digital newspapers possess the potential to exert a profound influence on a large scale and in a rapid manner. By framing events and topics in specific ways, media outlets can shape public opinion and shape the discourse surrounding current events. In this case, the representation of the 2023 presidential elections can influence not only public support but also narratives of division and identity. More specifically, the representations of political leaders (or candidates) can impact their public image, popularity, and electoral outcomes. In Cyprus, this can be evaluated a step further as not only does it impact popularity/electoral outcomes, but it can also shape the way individuals view the community the leader is attached to as a whole. Therefore, the representation of GsC presidential candidates in TsC digital newspapers assumes the character of an impactful instrument of media propaganda, ultimately influencing individuals' thoughts, voting behaviors, perceptions, and identities.

Evidently, the portrayal of presidential candidates in newspapers exerts a significant influence on public perception, which, in turn, permeates their personal image and the political platforms they represent (Doudaki & Carpentier, 2017). This influence assumes a defining role in electoral outcomes and significantly shapes the TsC population's perspectives on GsC involvement in politics and broader societal domains, thus impacting national identity and the ongoing peace-building efforts within a divided society. In democratic

societies, it becomes imperative for media outlets to provide accurate and impartial information to the public. However, it is well-documented that media bias and framing are pervasive phenomena, extending to digital newspapers in Cyprus as well. Certain newspapers may harbor specific agendas that color their presentation of information, consequently molding public opinion to align with their own political dispositions (Şahin, 2014). Consequently, this can produce a distorted portrayal of presidential candidates, entailing undue favoritism or undue criticism directed towards specific individuals or communities. It is essential to note that the multifaceted issue is further compounded within Cypriot society, given the historical prevalence of misinformation and propaganda that has fueled a divisive narrative pitting GsC against TsC and vice versa (Ross & Alankuş, 2010).

## 1.2 Complex Cypriot Identity

In divided societies, national identity serves as a primary form of identity, fostering a sense of belonging, historical continuity, and rootedness in a common territory. In the case of Cyprus, various concepts of national identity coexist, including Turkish, Turkish Cypriot, Cypriot, Greek, Greek Cypriot, and European identities. Particularly among Turkish Cypriots, , there is a struggle to establish a definitive identity (Şahin, 2011). Two competing nationalisms have emerged within Turkish Cypriot society. One perspective considers Turkish Cypriots as an integral part of the Turkish nation, without any differentiation between Turks and Turkish Cypriots. This viewpoint originated during inter-communal conflicts. Conversely, the other perspective acknowledges cultural differences to maintain a unique and separate Cypriot identity, which developed as a response to Turkish nationalism but is often misconstrued as a reaction to the Greek Cypriot community. Currently, both Turkish and Cypriot identities are striving to establish their legitimacy, with the media playing a central role in this ongoing struggle (Şahin, 2011).

The complexity of identity issues is exacerbated by the absence of a recognized state in the northern part of Cyprus. The "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC) holds a distinct position in the national identity debate. Despite being deemed illegal and unrecognized internationally, the TRNC has played a crucial role in shaping a sense of belonging and experiences of national identity. Historically, different religious groups had separate social institutions, but they still engaged in cultural interactions, exchanging traditions, values, and community norms. These socio-economic interactions fostered territorial togetherness, which laid the foundation for the initial notion of "Cypriotness" - a

shared sense of belonging and collective identity (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). However, inter-communal conflicts eventually overshadowed the collective identity in Cyprus. Instead of a unified identity, the narrative shifted to "Cyprus is Turkish" and "Cyprus is Greek," perpetuating division and abandoning a collective identity. Turkish Cypriots, in response to Greek Cypriot nationalism, emphasized their "Turkishness" while also asserting their attachment to the geographical territory of Cyprus, resulting in the inclusion of "Cypriotness" as a cultural aspect of their identity. The notion of collective identity within Cyprus remains a subject of discussion, particularly concerning its significance in achieving a peaceful solution (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006).

## 1.3 Understanding the Media Landscape in Turkish Cypriot Society

To comprehend the role of media in shaping national identities, it is crucial to examine the media structure within the society in question. Turkish Cypriot journalism emerged as a response to Greek Cypriot nationalism, serving as a platform to defend Turkish Cypriot rights and promote national consciousness (Şahin, 2014). The Turkish Cypriot media landscape consists of state-owned, private, and party-owned outlets, each influenced by political and economic interests. State-owned media, including the Turkish Cypriot Broadcasting Corporation (*BRTK*), aligns its news coverage with the state ideology. It plays a significant role in disseminating the official narrative and shaping public opinion. Private media outlets, on the other hand, are influenced by their owners' interests and ideologies. These outlets often reflect partisan positions, focusing on specific political perspectives and catering to particular audience segments (Şahin, 2014). This fragmentation of media ownership and perspectives further contributes to the polarization and division within Turkish Cypriot society.

The representation of Greek-speaking Cypriots (GsC) in Turkish Cypriot (TC) media provides an opportunity to explore the role of media in shaping identities and its impact on peace-building. The way GsC are portrayed in TC media can significantly influence intergroup perceptions and attitudes. Unfortunately, the existing literature suggests that GsC are often depicted in a negative light in TC media, reinforcing stereotypes and biases (Şahin, 2014).

## 1.4 Societal Relevance

The media's role in divided societies like Cyprus is instrumental in shaping national identities and influencing public opinion. In the case of Cyprus, where deep-seated divisions persist between GsC and TsC, the media has the power to either perpetuate these divisions or contribute to peace-building efforts. Understanding the complexities of media effects and the representation of different communities, such as the portrayal of Greek-speaking Cypriots in Turkish Cypriot media, is vital to fostering a collective Cypriot consciousness and promoting unity and thus reconciliation. By examining the representation of GsC in TC news media and analyzing the media landscape in Cyprus, we gain insights into the challenges and opportunities that media presents in divided societies. It is essential to encourage responsible and inclusive media practices that promote dialogue, understanding, and the development of a shared Cypriot identity. Only through such efforts can the media become a powerful force in building bridges and contributing to the peaceful resolution of conflicts in divided societies like Cyprus. Thus, the media coverage surrounding the 2023 presidential elections in the Republic of Cyprus offers a case in point. The representation of GsC in TC media during this period deserves scrutiny, as it can shed light on the broader dynamics of media's role in shaping national identities and inter-communal relations. It is crucial to examine how GsC are portrayed, the language used to describe them, and the framing of their political positions. Such an analysis can provide insights into the extent to which TC media contributes to fostering understanding, reconciliation, and a sense of shared Cypriot identity or otherwise. Thus, by critically engaging with media representation, we can challenge stereotypes, promote inclusivity, and foster a more equitable and representative media landscape to foster co-existence in Cyprus.

# 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to discuss the role of media in divided societies, with a particular focus on the island of Cyprus. It will explore the implications of media in peace-building efforts and the formation of national identity, specifically Cypriotness. Next, different media effects will be explored. Furthermore, the chapter will review the existing representation of Greek speaking Cypriots (GsC) in Turkish Cypriot (TC) news media and examine the structure of TC news media. It is important however to begin with a historical overview about Cyprus and the history of the Cyprus Issue and offer a conceptualization of identities.

## 2.1 The Cyprus Conflict: A Brief historical Account and Background Information

In order to understand the current situation in Cyprus, a brief general historical account taking 1914 as the starting point will be provided. 1914 is the year Cyprus was annexed by Great Britain after centuries of Ottoman rule. British colonial era marked the birth of nationalism in the island. In 1955, Greek-Cypriots formed the national organization of Cypriot fighters (EOKA), a guerrilla anticolonial movement that sought enosis with Greece. After five years of conflict, the British granted Cyprus independence in 1960, with the stipulation that Turkish-speaking and Greek speaking Cypriots would share power. The Republic of Cyprus, an independent state was therefore founded. Britain, Turkey, and Greece would still maintain rights to intervention as guarantor powers and Britain would sustain sovereignty over a couple military bases in the island (Dodd, 2010) which still exist today. In 1963, Archbishop Makarios, political leader of EOKA and the enosis campaign but also Cyprus' first President, began using fear tactics towards the TsC community by suggesting amendments to the constitution that would repeal previously agreed upon power-sharing agreements (Dodd, 2010). This can be considered a point of increased mistrust between leaders and the public, prompting inter-ethnic conflicts and the withdrawal of TsC from the previous power-sharing agreement (Dodd, 2010). In the next year (1964), UN peacekeepers entered the island and TsC withdrew to defended politico-territorial enclaves in which TsC moved or were forced to move and live in subhuman conditions for a decade (Kliot & Mansfeld, 1994).

In 1974 the Greek junta collaborating with GC ethno-nationalists conducted a military coup in opposition to Makarios, causing him to flee (Dodd, 2010). This is when Turkish troops invaded Cyprus, initiating a war resulting in the eventual occupation of a third of the

island in the north. The divide of north and south is along the 1963 armistice line drawn by the UN, referred to as the 'Green Line '(Dodd, 2010). Approximately 165,000 GsC and 45,000 TsC were forced to flee their homes and move to the designated sides (Dodd, 2010). This is when the Security Council UN requested that Turkey withdraw its troops, which was declined. Till today, 1974 is considered the most dramatic moment in Cypriot history, a turning/breaking point which consolidated de facto partition.

Following the war, President Rauf Denktas (TC leader) established an independent administration (Dodd, 2010). Less than a decade later Denktas terminated negotiations and peace talks declaring the "TRNC" which was recognized only by Turkey. This marks the moment where Turkey's invasive influence truly began. In the beginning of 2002, Clerides (fourth president of RoC) and Denktas recommenced talks under the auspices of the UN. In November 2002, Kofi Annan, the UN secretary general at the time proposed a peace plan in which a federation with two constituent parts would be governed by rotating presidency. In April 2004 a referendum was held regarding this plan (Annan Plan), in order to achieve joint EU accession (Dodd, 2010). This resulted in a very high turnout (89.19% GsC and 87% TsC) and an acceptance by TsC (64.91% in favor) and a rejection by GsC (75.38% against). Subsequently, the following May 2004, Cyprus entered the EU as a divided island. This was followed by a decade of maintaining the status quo.

Negotiations between the then-leaders appeared to make progress in 2016 but the following summer, Akıncı (former president of TRNC) and Anastasiades (former president of RoC) failed to agree on territorial adjustments during talks in Crans Montana (Vassiliou, 2018). Nonetheless, they were determined to continue negotiations. In January 2017, the historic Geneva Conference on Cyprus ended without an agreement. In 2018, negotiations between Akıncı and Anastasiades continued unsuccessfully (Vassiliou, 2018). In November 2020, the then TRNC prime minister ran for president and was elected through corrupt means (Akıncı, 2021). This was directly conveyed by the former TC leader, Akıncı in a Facebook post he published in April 2021: "If there are still people who cannot see what it means to interfere in all our institutions six months ago and to use all their means, then they must finally understand it today." (Akıncı, 2021). Here, Akıncı is referring to the 2020 elections in the TsC community during which Ersin Tatar was elected.

In 2023 the presidential elections took place within the GsC community resulting in the election of Nikos Christodoulides running as independent and supported, among other smaller parties, by DIKO and EDEK, two political parties of the center but which are holding

very critical and anti-federation stances. Given this brief history it is possible to delve into the relevant literature for this research.

## 2.2 Media and National Identities in Divided Societies

Scholars from various fields such as media studies, sociology, and political science have extensively studied the role of news media in shaping national identity and its contribution to peace-building endeavors. Thus, the relationship between news media and national identity, as well as its impact on peace-building efforts, is a topic of ongoing academic research and debate (Avraamidou, 2018). These studies have demonstrated that news media plays a significant role in shaping national identity by producing, transmitting, and constructing narratives that contribute to the discursive formation of a shared sense of identity (Ross & Alankuş, 2010). Through the construction of collective memory and the framing of national discourses on important issues, news media can foster a sense of national unity and common understanding among citizens, which is crucial for peace-building efforts.

The expression of national identity can be sustained through the distribution of narratives, landscapes, events, traditions, etc. By circulating this type of content, the media is able to provide a base for national identity (Edensor, 2002). The media does not only represent the nation, but it also redefines it depending on the specific way they represent it (Şahin, 2008). This can lead to a definition of 'we' which creates unity (Şahin, 2008). Additionally, the structure of the news media which makes separations between 'local' and 'foreign' adds to this feeling of national community (Billig, 1995). Meaning this may lead to a collective identity within TRNC but not among Cypriots as a whole. Similar practices occur in the RoC news as well. Although the articulation of collective memory can lead to the formation of 'we' and unity it can also lead to the opposite. The media represents the 'other' by identifying negative stereotypes (Şahin, 2008). Essentially, by attaching these negative stereotypes to the other, an 'enemy' of the nation is created by the media which 'enforces ethnocentric and nationalist perceptions among people' (Şahin, 2008, p. 27). Some ways in which the concept of the 'enemy' is reinforced is through the expression of old cultural myths and negative portrayals of neighboring countries (Şahin, 2008). By reinforcing the concept of the enemy and expressing these negative portrayals the media is able to strengthen the fear of losing 'our' identity which leads to nationalistic feelings and intensifies negative emotions towards the other (Şahin, 2008).

Another recent study by Lieberman and Miller (2021) delves into the complex nature of ethnic divisions and the role of media in African countries, specifically Nigeria and South Africa. Their research highlights the influence of elite strategies in creating a minimum winning coalition to gain political power and material benefits, thereby shaping ethnic identifications. In societies divided along ethnic lines, it is often assumed that distributional battles and competition are driven by ethnic considerations (Lieberman & Miller, 2021). State institutions and dynamics of electoral competition also contribute to the prominence of subnational (ethnic) identifications (Lieberman & Miller, 2021). By analyzing comments sections of news articles related to political parties and leaders, Lieberman and Miller (2021) discovered a strong correlation between keywords associated with political competition, state power, and ethnic comments. These findings emphasize the intricate interplay between ethnic divisions, politics, and the media in African contexts. By shedding light on how news media can influence ethnic identities and attitudes, the authors provide valuable insights for policymakers, journalists, and citizens to foster greater understanding and unity across ethnic lines. However, their findings also suggest that news media can shape individuals' cognitive schemas, particularly regarding the perception of the "other" or "them." A central finding is that when news stories are reported with explicit reference to subnational ethnic categories, this causes a more 'toxic 'tone (Lieberman and Miller, 2021). Meaning the reference to ethnicity led to hostile narratives in a way. Framing on ethnic lines increases the chances for intergroup competition which was observed to be expressed through highly uncivil language. This type of reporting will not lead to nation-building, if anything it will limit it.

*2.3 Media Effects and Tone*

Language use in news media has an influential impact on identity and us/them narratives. In addition to language, tone has also been a point of discussion in this realm of research (Wu & Shen, 2020). Before delving into the relevance of tone in media representation it is important to outline the media effects that are at play, as tone and language facilitate these effects. Borah (2016) outlines a number of media effects including framing and agenda setting. In summary, framing refers to the process that involves the selection and presentation of certain aspects of a story while excluding or downplaying others (Borah, 2016). A few aspects of framing that can be categorized conflict frame, responsibility frame, and human-interest frame, will be discussed as they pertain to this research. In conflict framing, the most controversial aspects of the issue being discussed will be emphasized, with

a focus on tensions and contradictions. Human interest framing can be explained as the emphasis on personal narratives, emotional dimensions, and individual experiences associated with an issue. Whereas responsibility framing involves the assigning of accountability or blame to specific individuals, groups, or institutions, thereby focusing on the consequences of their actions or decisions (Borah, 2016). Agenda-setting, though similar to framing in nature, is a slightly different media effect. Agenda-setting refers to the media's ability to influence which topics and issues are deemed significant and deserving of public attention (Borah, 2016).

Essentially, framing and agenda-setting provide considerable influence over public opinion and understanding through their ability to shape media representations. Both concepts highlight the significance of potential biases within media representation. Tone and language contribute to these media effects. The way language and tone are used can assist in framing particular news media in a beneficial or detrimental way. For example, the use of an evaluative tone when reporting news particularly concerning a political figure was found to have an impact on the way individuals evaluate them (Kepplinger et al., 1989). Similarly, within agenda setting the use of an affective tone can impact the way individuals think about the subject (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Wu and Shen (2020) highlight the fact that negative news is seen as more powerful and has more influence on people's views. Through investigating the influence of negative bias in news media on polarization they concluded that the aforementioned concepts are confirmed.

## 2.4 Cypriot Identities: From Ethno-Nationalism to Cypriotism

In divided societies, national identity serves as a primary form of identity, fostering a sense of belonging, historical continuity, and rootedness in a common territory (Şahin, 2011). In the case of Cyprus, various concepts of national identity coexist, including Turkish, Turkish Cypriot, Cypriot, Greek, Greek Cypriot, and European identities. Turkish Cypriots, in particular, grapple with the search for a definitive identity. Each identity represents a distinct understanding of national belonging, emphasizing connections with either Turkey or Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot (GC) community.

Within Turkish Cypriot society, two nationalisms have emerged. One viewpoint considers Turkish Cypriots as an integral part of the Turkish nation, without any differentiation between Turks and Turkish Cypriots. This perspective originated during inter-communal struggles. Conversely, the other perspective acknowledges cultural differences to

maintain a unique and separate Cypriot identity, developed in response to Turkish nationalism but often misconstrued as a reaction to the GC community. Presently, both Turkish and Cypriot identities are striving to establish their legitimacy, with the media playing a central role in this ongoing struggle.

The complexity of identity issues is exacerbated by the absence of a recognized state in the northern part of Cyprus. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) holds a distinct position in the national identity debate. Despite being deemed illegal and unrecognized internationally, the TRNC has played a crucial role in shaping a sense of belonging and experiences of national identity (Şahin, 2011). Historically, different religious groups had separate social institutions, but they still engaged in cultural interactions, exchanging traditions, values, and community norms (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). These socio-economic interactions fostered territorial togetherness, which laid the foundation for the initial notion of "Cypriotness" - a shared sense of belonging and collective identity. However, due to inter-communal conflicts, nationalism eventually overshadowed the collective identity in Cyprus. Instead of a unified identity, the narrative shifted to "Cyprus is Turkish" and "Cyprus is Greek," perpetuating division (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). Turkish Cypriots, in response to GC nationalism, emphasized their "Turkishness" while also asserting their attachment to the geographical territory of Cyprus, resulting in the inclusion of "Cypriotness" as a cultural aspect of their identity (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). The notion of collective identity within Cyprus remains a subject of discussion, particularly concerning its significance in achieving a peaceful solution.

A prime example of the ongoing identity conflicts and struggles that Cypriot people face was well illustrated back in 2003 when the 'famous 'words of Rauf Denktas were put into satirical action. Three Cypriots (Two GsC and one TsC) were arrested at the Turkish Cypriot checkpoint due to the appearance of a donkey, with a fake passport reading: 'Mr. Cyprus'. The incident was later mockingly reported by *Afrika* (now called *Avrupa*) newspaper with the headline '2 Greeks, 1 Turk, and 1 true Cypriot were arrested '(*Afrika*, 2003 as cited in Şahin, 2011). This was to mock the words of the president of TRNC (Rauf Denktaş) at the time. He had stated that 'there's only one living Cypriot in Cyprus and that is the Cypriot donkey '(Çagla, 1995 as cited in Şahin, 2011). Nonetheless, this issue of identity is highly significant and of course the media plays a role in how identity is portrayed and debated (Şahin, 2011).

Undeniably, TC media have played a role in both the formation and spread of attitudes towards GsC as well as responded to Turkish nationalism through the rise of Cypriot

nationalism (Şahin, 2011). These on-going identity struggles are inherently subject to the us/them dichotomy. According to Reicher and Hopkins (2001) identity constructs the norms and values that dictate self-interest. Thus, it is expected that the definitions of identity will influence the way the 'other 'is treated and perceived. The categorization of identity may produce general principles on how the 'other 'is treated (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). More specifically, one can conduct themselves towards the other through determining their effect on one's collective interest. If the other enhances their national interest, they are accepted, but if they threaten national interest then they are rejected (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Essentially, the way the other is viewed all depends upon the way in which the national interest is construed. There are dangers in 'equating particular political projects with the importance of national identity '(Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, p.76). In the context of Cyprus, this is highly relevant as identity is often in the central stage of political discussions around reunification or partition. Despite the potential for news media to contribute to peace-building, it can also exacerbate conflicts and divisions by perpetuating stereotypes, disseminating false information, and reinforcing prejudices (Şahin, 2022). This is especially evident in divided states where the construction of national identity can vary among different communities (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). In the case of Cyprus, for instance, it has been argued that Cypriot nationalism transcends Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot nationalism (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). The media plays a crucial role in these fluctuations (Christophorou, 2010; Şahin, 2011). Unfortunately, maintaining a collective identity, apart from historical aspects, becomes highly challenging due to the agendas, discourses, and labels propagated by the media (Ross & Alankuş, 2010). The media often privileges the perspectives of the nationalist elite, reinforcing the existing status quo and shaping the social assumptions that individuals associate with their collective identity (Ross & Alankuş, 2010). In already divided societies, the media's construction of collective identity further intensifies the "us" versus "them" narrative due to the divisive nature of different newspapers pushing distinct agendas on both "sides". It can be argued that Cypriotism or a collective Cypriot consciousness is the steppingstone to a peaceful coexistence (Avraamidou, 2018).

The maintenance of collective identity often involves downplaying internal differences within a group while emphasizing the perceived threat posed by outsiders (Ross & Alankuş, 2010). This complexity is evident in Cypriot society and other divided communities. It can be assumed that the narrative of collective identity in Cyprus is not shared by the entire Cypriot community but rather exists separately between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. This brings us back to the issue of the fluctuating and intricate nature

of Cypriot national identity. As Ross and Alankuş (2010) suggests, "within nationalistic media discourse, geographic borders of nation-states take on significance [that] goes far beyond geography" (p. 244).

## 2.5 Turkish Cypriot Media Landscape

The inter-communal conflict on the island of Cyprus has had a significant impact on Turkish Cypriot journalism. The emergence of the Turkish language press was a response to the Greek Cypriot nationalist enosis movement, serving as a platform to defend Turkish Cypriot rights and promote national consciousness (Şahin, 2014). The Turkish Cypriot leadership utilized the press to create a unified voice against Greek Cypriots, employing mechanisms of ideological control to suppress criticism of their policies (Şahin, 2014). Journalists who questioned state policies were often labeled as traitors and faced threats, imprisonment, or even murder (Şahin, 2014). Consequently, a culture of avoidance developed within the media, particularly concerning criticism of authority and nationalist ideologies (Şahin, 2014).

The news media in the Turkish-Cypriot community (TRNC) follows what Hallin and Mancini (2004) refer to as the Mediterranean media model. This model is characterized by involvement in political conflicts, advocacy reporting, dependence on the state, political parties, or wealthy sponsors, and limited development of journalism as an independent profession (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Currently, Turkish Cypriot news media consists of a combination of state-owned, private, and party-owned outlets, with their political and economic interests shaping the content they produce (Şahin, 2014). State-owned media aligns its news with the state ideology and tends to avoid critical coverage of government policies due to the appointment of board members by the government (Şahin, 2014). TAK (Türk Ajansı Kıbrıs or Turkish Agency Cyprus), for instance, is a major source of news related to Cyprus for the public (Şahin, 2014). Private media outlets reflect the interests of their owners, and any shift in owners' ideologies can result in corresponding changes in the media's output (Çatal, 2006). Party-owned newspapers, which emerged after 1974, prioritize interpretation and commentary over objective reporting and frame news according to party policies (Şahin, 2014). They source news from TAK and adjust it to align with party ideologies, ranging from favoring close ties with Turkey to supporting a solution based on federation in Cyprus.

Thus far, Turkish Cypriot news media has played a detrimental role in conflict resolution and has contributed to the dissemination of nationalist discourse that portrays

Greek speaking Cypriots in a negative light (Şahin, 2014), the press generally fails to facilitate understanding between the two communities. Although there have also been instances where Turkish Cypriot media played a positive role such as during the 2004 Annan Plan period (Avraamidou, 2018). However, oftentimes, Turkish Cypriot news outlets tend to focus on highlighting positive aspects of their own community while highlighting the wrong-doings of Greek speaking Cypriots. Similar practices can be observed in Greek Cypriot media as well (Christophorou, 2010). Ross and Alankuş (2010) argues that media discourse in Cyprus perpetuates animosity and hampers the emergence of a transnational identity. The media creates and amplifies labels that signify membership and exclusion, establishing collective notions of belonging and commonality through highlighted differences (Alankuş, 2010). The history of a divided population in Cyprus justifies dominant bi-communalism and rejects a pan-Cypriot identity (Ross & Alankuş, 2010).

The objective of this study is to explore the representation of Greek speaking Cypriots in Turkish Cypriot media by examining the news coverage of the 2023 presidential elections in the Republic of Cyprus. By focusing on this specific event, the study aims to gain insights into the representation of the communities' identities and the role of the media in peace-building processes. The findings will shed light on how the media contributes to the formation and maintenance of Cypriot national identity and its impact on peace in Cyprus.

# 3. Method

As this research aims to analyze the representation of GsC presidential candidates in Turkish Cypriot newspapers during the 2023 presidential elections a qualitative research method was employed. In the following section, the methodological guidelines for this study will be determined. More specifically, the qualitative method of choice, thematic analysis, and the sample will be described. Subsequently, the coding procedure will be presented. Finally, the importance of credibility, transferability, and reflexivity will be elaborated on.

## 3.1 Thematic Analysis

Qualitative methods are suitable for answering open-ended questions and can offer a more comprehensive explanation of the aforementioned concepts, allowing the researcher to ascertain what is worth observing/analyzing (Babbie, 2014). Babbie (2014) indicates that two considerations must be made before proceeding with conducting research. First, the researcher must be as transparent as possible and second, the most effective method should be selected (Babbie, 2014). For the purpose of this research, the qualitative method of thematic analysis will be utilized. This is the chosen method as it allows for searching across a dataset and finding repeated patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to conduct this thematic analysis, the six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) will be utilized. Through using thematic analysis, it is possible to apply a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches and is known for being a flexible approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The flexibility of this method makes it possible to produce a rich and complex account of a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a thematic analysis is carried out through six phases/steps: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

This method, like all others, has some limitations. Braun and Clarke (2006) summarize these 5 pitfalls as follows: failure to actually analyze, using data collection questions as themes, weak or unconvincing analysis, mismatch between the data and the analytic claims made, and mismatch between theory and analytic theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to take these pitfalls into consideration and try to avoid them while conducting a thematic analysis.

*3.2 Sample*

The sampling method in this case is purposive sampling. According to Babbie (2014) this form of non-probability sampling allows the researcher to make a selection regarding the materials based on their own judgment of usefulness. The use of purposive sampling is beneficial as it "provides the researcher with the justifications to make generalizations from the sample that is being studied" (Rai & Thapa, 2015, p. 9). Of course, purposive sampling also has some limitations, such as being prone to researcher bias, however this can be counteracted by remaining transparent and taking a reflexive approach (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

The data corpus included all news articles regarding the four candidates who were supported by parliamentary parties and the GC elections. Articles that discuss the elections without a focus on a particular candidate were also included. Essentially, any items relating to the representation of the GsC candidates and the elections were included from 5 daily newspapers with an online presence. Initially these included *Yeni Düzen*, (left leaning news site) *Halkın Sesi* (center standing news site), *Güneş* (right leaning news site), and *BRTK* (official radio and television broadcasting corporation of TRNC, reflects the party of the incumbent leader). The data set was selected on the basis of including newspaper sites from all along the political spectrum and they reflect a large spectrum of opinions in TRNC. They must also be official news sites with some form of credibility. The elections took place on February 5, 2023, and proceeded to a second round the following week (February 11, 2023) as none of the candidates received more than 50% in the first round. It is important to note that during the period between the first and second round of elections an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 occurred in parts of Turkey and was also felt in Cyprus. It was expected that during this time news coverage of the elections was less prominent as the focus was on this natural disaster, its consequences, and the humanitarian aid being sent from TRNC and RoC. As expected, most media coverage was aimed at covering this disaster and a significantly lower portion of articles attended to the elections. Therefore, the number of articles prior to the first round of elections was increased and news coverage from one week after the second round of elections was also considered. Thus, all news articles and opinion pieces for a period of one week prior to and after the elections as well as the week in between the two rounds were considered. Articles that have less than 100 words were also excluded. Including shorter articles could result in what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as a weak or unconvincing analysis. By doing so the representation of GsC candidates and its implications on identity and peace building can be examined in a substantial manner. Another noteworthy aspect of

the data set is the nature of the column pieces. Oftentimes, columnists choose to write for newspapers that align with their political views and vice versa. More information about each newspaper studied follow alongside information about the sampling and collection process.

      *Yeni Düzen* has been around since 1975, is left leaning and supports a federal solution uniting Turkish and Greek speaking Cypriots. *Halkın Sesi* has been around since 1942 and is known for previously promoting Turkish nationalism; they have now shifted to a more central stance. *Güneş* is a right leaning news site that originated in Turkey and now has a Cyprus edition. After running through all news articles from January 29th (one week before the elections) until February 18th (one week after the elections) it became apparent that *Güneş* newspaper did not contain an analyzable number of articles which would have led to a weak analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, afterwards two other news sources were added, Avrupa (previously known as Afrika, a left leaning news site) and *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* (right leaning news site). It is important to note that all newspapers in TRNC obtain their content from TAK (Türk Ajansı Kıbrıs). This leads to a large overlap among the newspapers in terms of content, especially in relation to the topic under examination. The conclusions that can be drawn regarding TAK (as this is the source of the news), is that they use a relatively neutral tone, and use a mix of terminology. They use terms like 'Turkish Cypriot/Greek Cypriot' (Kıbrıslı Türk/Kıbrıslı Rum) and 'North/South side' (Güney/Kuzey tarafı), excluding the use of extremely divisive language like 'Greeks' (Rumlar), or 'Greek side' (Rum tarafı), which is considered politically incorrect. They do however refer to the RoC as 'Greek administration' (Rum yönetimi), this could be attributed to the influence/control of the occupying power.

      In total, 5 online newspapers were analyzed (see Appendix A), including 79 articles in total, 21 of which were column pieces. 15 articles from Yeni Düzen averaging at 450 words per article, 14 articles from Avrupa at 315 words, 21 articles from Halkın Sesi at 262 words, 6 articles from BRTK at 301 words, and 23 articles from Kıbrıs Gazetesi at 426 words per article. An overview of the total number of articles and column/opinion pieces, average word count per article, and the political standing of the news sites can be found in the appendix (see Appendix B).

## 3.3 Coding Procedure

      After compiling all articles within the indicated timeframe of 29 January until 18 February, articles were skimmed in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the

content. The articles were then organized into documents in order to prepare for the coding process. A deductive approach was taken, in which the theoretical framework aided in the process of categorizing the data e.g. creating initial codes. The articles were manually coded by highlighting meaningful portions of text and assigning them an initial code in the form of short sentences or labels. After the articles were manually coded and the initial codes were generated, the codes were reviewed to highlight possible patterns and themes. At which point, patterns began to appear resulting in broader themes which consequently revealed 62 initial codes which were reviewed and distilled into 28 broader codes. These code groups were then reviewed based on how they represent the candidates and influence national identity. The codes were then merged to produce the initial themes; us/them dichotomy, divided national identity, vilification of presidential candidates and turkey, blame towards actors causing a lack of desired solution, and distrust in authority/intentions. These initial themes were then reviewed and cross-checked with the codes generated in the first stage, and were refined or split accordingly resulting in the final themes; divided Cypriot identity: the us/them dichotomy and instances of inclusion and exclusion, vilification: representing presidential candidates and foreign powers, and pessimism and blame games: the status-quo as a dead end. The codes and themes were then organized into a coding table to visually summarize the findings (see appendix C). The final themes were then used to produce the report of the thematic analysis.

A few codes from each final theme will be presented in order to provide a small overview of how these themes were reached. The theme relating to identity was formed after grouping these codes; Greek, Greek administration, Greek side, Turkish side, Turkish Cypriot, Greek Cypriot, Turkish speaking Cypriot, Greek speaking Cypriot, etc. These codes all relate to different and varying representation of identities within Cyprus according to the newspapers. They resulted in the initial theme of us/them dichotomy and was refined into the final theme of, divided Cypriot identity: the us/them dichotomy and instances of inclusion and exclusion. The theme relating to the representation of the candidates and elections was formed on the basis of grouping these codes; unique, weird, careless, resentful, etc. These codes pertain to the different thought and opinions surrounding the candidates and elections which resulted the initial themes of; vilification of presidential candidates, RoC, GsC, and Turkey and blame towards actors causing a lack of desired solution. These initial themes were then groups to produce the final theme; vilification: representing presidential candidates and foreign powers. Lastly, the theme relating to the pessimist view on the possibility of a desired solution was formed on the basis of these codes; impossible, constant

waiting, years of unsettlement, certainty about no solution, hopelessness, etc. These codes produced the initial codes pessimism towards a desired solution to the Cyprus problem and distrust in authority/intentions. These themes were then finalized to create the theme; pessimism and blame games: the status-quo as a dead end.

## 3.4 Credibility, Transferability and Reflexivity

The quality of qualitative research depends on five aspects according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). Two of which include credibility and transferability. First, credibility or internal validity must be ensured by comparing the finding of this research to previous research on similar topics. This will be done through linking the resulting themes from the thematic analysis to the aforementioned theories and findings of previous research in the field. Second, transferability, this refers to the ability to apply the findings of this study to a related study with different circumstances and researchers. By linking the findings not only to literature based on Cyprus but also similar international studies, it is possible to increase the transferability of this research. Additionally, Silverman (2011) mentions and emphasized the importance of being transparent regarding the theory and methods used in the research. This can be reviewed in the theoretical framework and methods section. Silverman (2011) also stresses the importance of taking a reflexive approach.

It is significant to look into the importance of a reflexive approach in qualitative analysis, which involves being aware of the researcher's own biases and assumptions, and actively considering how they might influence the interpretation of the data (Silverman, 2011). The researcher in this case is a Turkish speaking Cypriot in favor of a united federal Cyprus and must remain reflexive throughout the process. Although it is not possible to remove these biases, being aware of them and remaining reflexive is important. Silverman (2011) also suggests several methods for achieving credibility in qualitative research, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and negative case analysis. Silverman (2011) also notes that the credibility of qualitative research depends on the researcher's ability to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the data and to demonstrate that the findings are grounded in the data.

## 3.5 Limitations

A few limitations were faced while conducting this research. Since the Turkish-Cypriot media are relatively new to the digital sphere, oftentimes the newspapers provide

incomplete online archives. This was apparent in all five newspapers (*Halkın Sesi, Kıbrıs Gazetesi, Avrupa, Yeni Düzen, BRTK*). The archives that were available were very disorganized making it difficult to navigate. More specifically, *Halkın Sesi* did not provide an updated account of column articles on their webpage, which took away a substantial portion of analyzable data. Throughout the analysis it became clear that these column articles were the parts of the newspaper where true analysis could be drawn. This is attributed to the fact that the articles on the news sites are nearly identical as they are all taken from TAK. This means that in order to delve into the differences between the papers it was necessary to have access to the column articles. Nonetheless, it was possible to make a significant analysis using the provided articles. This absence of updated material and missing articles could be explained through the lack of change from traditional to digital news media in TRNC. Şahin (2022) notes that the shift to digital news media in TRNC was mainly the digitalizing of traditional journalism as opposed to practicing online multimedia journalism. More specifically, as Şahin (2022) documented from an personal interview "In Cyprus we have not moved to digital journalism properly. Neither the infrastructure nor the news production process has changed. We haven't made a radical transformation…." (Şahin, 2022, p. 164).

Another limitation faced concerns language issues. All articles are written in the Turkish language, meaning that some substantial pieces of information may get lost in translation. All quotations retrieved from the articles were, however, translated in the most accurate way possible using translation tools and AI. Another limitation is the lack of articles on the other two candidates that were aimed to be analyzed as well. The lack of mention is a finding in itself, which will be discussed in the following sections. Finally, although a reflexive approach is being taken, it is undeniable that certain biases and personal opinions can influence the finding and interpretations taken from the analysis (see also reflexivity section), however this was mitigate via a good understanding and use of existing literature (Borah, 2016; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 2021; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Şahin, 2011; Şahin, 2008; Wu & Shen, 2020).

# 4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the thematic analysis of five TsC newspapers across the political spectrum, more specifically of *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, *Yeni Düzen*, *Halkın Sesi*, *Avrupa*, and *BRTK*. First, the theme of divided Cypriot identity: the us/them dichotomy and instances of inclusion and exclusion will be explored, followed by the theme of vilification: representing presidential candidates and foreign powers. Finally, the last theme of pessimism and blame games: the status-quo as a dead end with the subsection distrust in authority/intentions will be discussed.

Before delving into the results, it is important to note the first observation that the majority newspapers receive their news from *TAK* (<u>Türk</u> Ajansı Kıbrıs). More specifically, articles (extracted from *TAK*) concerning activities occurring in the Republic of Cyprus seem to be drawn most often from the GC newspapers *Politis* (central) and *Fileleftheros* (liberal), newspapers published in RoC. This means that the analysis and quotations are largely drawn from column or opinion pieces as they more clearly express the interests/political standpoint of the newspapers, a notion that Çatal (2006) addresses. *BRTK* (official radio and television broadcasting corporation of TRNC, reflects the party of the incumbent leader) does not publish any column pieces and *Halkın Sesi* only published a small portion of the column/opinion pieces on the online database, meaning if column pieces do exist, they are not accessible particularly within the period under research. In essence, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, *Yeni Düzen*, and *Avrupa* provided the bulk of the substantial analysis. Taking this into account, it is now possible to delve into the results of this thematic analysis.

## 4.1 Divided Cypriot Identity: The Us/Them Dichotomy and Instances of Inclusion and Exclusion

The concept of us/them can be seen as a prominent factor in the on-going divide in Cyprus. In all the newspapers some sense of an us/them discourse is present. The crucial difference is who is identified as us and them, which varies depending on the newspaper and its political affiliations (Çatal, 2006). Overall, two different perspectives of the us/them were observed. For the right leaning papers the general observations that were made regarding the us/them dichotomy were as follows: they view GsC and TsC as two very separate and different communities, reject Cypriotism and rather latch onto a Turkish identity, reject the idea of united federal Cyprus and support a two state solution in which Cyprus is annexed by

Turkey. They also use very definite and absolute language that leaves no room for a different interpretation.

This is an example by *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* which said that "The government on the south is 100% a Greek Government that is consisting of Greeks. It is out of the question to be patched to this government." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 18 February 2023). In this example the 'other 'is considered as Greek when they are referring to GsC. The way *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* emphasizes us/them is through the use of separatist discourse, they use terms like "rum tarafı" which means "Greek side", "rumlar" which means "Greeks", and "rum yönetimi' which means "Greek administration". This emphasizes through the use of 'Greeks ' and 'Greek administration 'the us/them discourse. Through emphasizing their connection to a Turkish nationalist identity, they construct their idea of the other which in turn impact the way the other is treated, this is in line with previous research (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Newspapers examined and in particular *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* also refer to the 1974 Turkish invasion as "Cyprus Peace Operation" (Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı). It is concerning that they are referring to an invasion/war as a peace operation. This language absolutely rejects the existence of Cypriot identity and completely disregards the common culture GsC and TsC share. Particularly, the use of 'Greek administration' is extremely concerning and problematic, as this is rooted in the fact that Turkey refuses to recognize the RoC, and TC writers in *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* are perpetuating this and making it more 'real'. Essentially, they see themselves as Turkish and the 'other side 'as Greeks, making it much easier to maintain and strengthen the already existent divide and reject the common culture and identity of Cypriotism. Rather than focusing on commonalities between the communities they choose to reproduce and highlight the alleged differences. As Şahin (2008) dictates, collective memory influences the way national identity is constructed and experienced. The construction of identity particularly within *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* is through emphasizing the collective memory of war and conflict. Similarly, Edensor (2002) indicated that the circulation of such content creates the base for national identity. The 'base' being portrayed by *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* is divise in the way it focuses solely on conflict and war as opposed to commonalities among the communities. This also demonstrates conflict framing presented by Borah (2016). In the next example by *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* it is claimed that these differences always existed, and 'we 'were never the same, "Long before the physical division on the island of Cyprus, communities were divided." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 1 February 2023)

In other newspapers, typically left leaning ones like *Yeni Düzen* and *Avrupa* they completely reject this divisive discourse. *Yeni Düzen* uses terms like 'Greek Cypriot, Turkish

Cypriot '(Kıbrıslı Rum, Kıbrıslı Turk) and refers to RoC as exactly that (Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti), refusing to follow the example Turkey has set by not recognizing the republic. *Avrupa* goes a step further and makes no ethnic distinction between TsC and GsC by simply differentiating them by the languages spoken 'Turkish speaking Cypriot, Greek speaking Cypriot '(Türkçe konuşan Kıbrıslılar, Rumca konuşan Kıbrıslılar). Both newspapers refer to the 1974 Turkish invasion as an invasion and use the term 'occupation' (işgal) acknowledging the role of foreign powers (particularly Turkey) on the situation in Cyprus, contrary to *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*. At times, *Avrupa* also refers to the RoC as 'the free regions of Cyprus '(Kıbrısın özgür bölgeleri), further acknowledging the occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. In general, *Yeni Düzen* reports in a relatively 'neutral 'way. Thus, there is not much of an us/them narrative being depicted. *Avrupa* does however make an us/them distinction. Contrary to *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, *Avrupa* creates an us/them discourse by identifying 'them 'as Turkey as opposed to GsC and 'us 'as all Cypriots (both GsC and TsC). They emphasize the connection between GsC and TsC, highlighting Cypriotism and there connection to the island of Cyprus as opposed to a Turkish identity: "…due to the regime in the occupied area and settler colonialism, the place where they can reflect their will is the Republic of Cyprus, with which they identify more closely." and "Contrary to the political elite and "civil society" groups benefiting from the status quo, Turkish-speaking Cypriots see the Republic of Cyprus as the greatest assurance.." (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 5 February 2023). Although *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen TAK*e this stance it is concerning that the positions of *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* may be regarded as more prominent as negative news is viewed as more powerful/impactful (Wu & Shen, 2020). Ross and Alankuş (2010) looks into the ways media privileges perspectives on national elites, that being *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* in this case.

The TsC identity is clearly complex and appears to be polarized. Conflicting representations are clearly identified which are in line with existing literature (Şahin, 2011). The attachment to a Turkish identity *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* exhibits is not only clear through the very specific language they use, but also through their suggestions and thoughts towards a 'solution 'or lack thereof in Cyprus. They express the 'impossibility 'of moving forward in any way unless TRNC is recognized as its own independent state, followed by a two-state solution, resulting in further connection with the occupier:
"In this context, there can only be an agreement based on TWO EQUAL STATES. Therefore, it is out of question to start OFFICIAL talks without the TRNC being recognized." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 18 February 2023). In this example, the attachment to Turkish nationalism is very clear as the desire for a two-state solution is being emphasized which is

the long-lasting aim of Turkish nationalists in the island. A two-state solution would only strengthen ties with the occupier (Turkey) and weaken ties between Cypriot communities, which seems to be the desired outcome for them.

Another clear point of attachment to the Turkish identity is conveyed through this example in which Turkey is being referenced during the period of the earthquake: "On the one hand, we grieve for the tens of thousands of brothers we lost in the Motherland." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023). Referring to Turkey as the supposed "motherland" is an extremely Turkish nationalist statement. It is common that Turkish nationalists in Cyprus refer to Turkish citizens as their brothers, and Turkey as their 'motherland 'whereas leftists or those in favor of a united federal Cyprus would refer to Cypriots (GsC and TsC) as their 'brothers 'or Cyprus as their motherland, showing attachment to the Cypriot identity. This is in line with the notion of 'Cyprus is Turkish' vs. 'Cyprus is Greek' discussed by Ross & Alankuş (2010). They proceed by making the statement that:

> In the Cyprus problem, I accept the definition of the 'Turkish side' as Turkey and the TRNC or the union of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side. … Whatever agreement we come to, Turkey's effective and de facto guarantor will continue to be strengthened. (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 18 February 2023)

In both cases they are explicitly stating their desire to and acceptance of fully connecting with the occupying nation (Turkey).

## 4.2 Vilification: Representing Presidential Candidates and Foreign Powers

This theme explores the ways in which GsC presidential candidates were represented in the newspapers. This can be reflected in the term "vilification" which refers to the portrayal of candidates, organizations, and countries in a negative light. Then, notably which actors were vilified depended on the newspaper in question and their political standing. It can be assumed that the way the candidates and other actors are framed, in combination with the tone of voice used can lead to polarizing views within the community. This is in line with previous research on tone, framing, and agenda setting as well as Hallin and Mancini's (2004) Mediterranean media model. (Borah, 2016; Kepplinger et al. 1989; Wu & Shen,

2020). First the theme discusses the homogenization of all candidates in the newspapers and then discusses how individual candidates were presented.

Through vilifying the candidates, GsC, and RoC as a whole, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* are able to push their agendas that revolve around an ethnically divided, two state Cyprus:

> If there is a clear truth, neither candidate intends to respond positively to the Turkish Cypriot side's stance for a solution. Both of them think that with the support they will receive from the international arena, they can solve the Cyprus issue as they wish. (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 1 February 2023)

Here when they say 'both of them' they are referring to the candidates Nikos Christodoulides and Andreas Mavroyiannis. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* speak of the TsC sides' stance for a solution in a very absolute way, Taking the stance that it is a given that all TsC want to be annexed by Turkey (which is not the case as we can see in the positions expressed by *Avrupa*). They also emphasize that the candidates in the RoC are opposed to their wants in an attempt to once again create a wider gap between TsC and GsC. This is in line with Reicher and Hopkins (2001) theory on national identity which states one conducts themselves towards the 'other' through determining their effect on one's collective interest. They also state that if the other enhances their national interest, they are accepted, but if they threaten national interest then they are rejected (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). They reject Mavroyiannis for his pro-united federal Cyprus stance and Christodoulides for his desire to return to negotiations under the pretenses that ties with Turkey be severed. Both of which dismiss the possibility or desire for the recognition of TRNC and annexation by Turkey, as well as the strengthening of ties with the occupier in anyway, which *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* has expressed as their desired outcome. This vilification of the candidates, RoC, and GsC is carried out through 'trash talking 'and using mocking and bitter language: "While we live our pain, Christodoulides won" (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023). Here they are referring to the earthquake that occurred in Turkey, yet it is unknown how the ongoing presidential election could be linked to a natural disaster, thus portraying an unnecessary bitter tone. As mentioned in the previous section, since *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* have portrayed that they identify as Turkish and view GsC as Greeks (Vural & Rustemli, 2006) they project their nationalist views on the GC government in order to put the blame on anyone but themselves and their so called 'motherland'. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* tends to highlight the historical wrong-doings of the 'other side'. Often these wrong doings are mentioned throughout articles pertaining to Nikos Christodoulides and the elections:

> BLOCKING THE RECOGNITION OF THE TRNC aims to sabotage our economic development by keeping us in isolation and embargoes, and to consolidate their one hundred percent Greek state within the EU. … The Greeks established EOKA against British colonial rule with the aim of ENOSIS. (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023)

Although here there is no direct mention of candidates, these statements are sprinkled into articles about the candidates creating an association between the candidate in question and this blameful comment.

The newspapers also vilified individual candidates and specifically the newly elected Christodoulides and incumbent president of RoC. This is an observation that is not exclusive to *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, it is seen throughout the other newspapers as well. Here is an example in which *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* vilify one the candidates through a mocking tone: "Nikos Christodoulides, one of the princes of Greek Cyprus political life" (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023). They are mocking Christodoulides by calling him a "prince". Here they are mocking Christodoulides regarding his on-going position within politics and the years of 'special' treatment and benefits he has been reaping while it seems he has not contributed to a solution in Cyprus but rather done the opposite. Although these may appear to be' small comments', using mocking language like this can influence the way people view him (and GsC in general) or whether or not they will *TAK*e him seriously (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Another way in which they vilify Christodoulides is by comparing him to his rival candidate, Mavroyiannis whom *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* also do not have a warm approach towards, yet they still use him to make Christodoulides look worse: "Compared to Mavroyiannis, Christodoulides is far from contributing courageously to the solution process. However, we can say that separatism predominates between the lines of his speeches after his candidacy was finalized." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023). It appears that Christodoulides 'past mis*TAK*es and contributions to a failed peace talk in Crans Montana and his perceived lack of care for TRNC are being highlighted. This in turn, creates the image that Christodoulides is unqualified and careless: "The victory of Christodoulides will endanger even some of the possibilities that exist today. He's proud to be the chief architect of the destruction of Crans Montana, and his views are extreme." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 4 February 2023) and "Nikos Christodoulides is not deeply curious about the future of the political structure in the North and the positions of the players." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs*

*Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023). Christodoulides is depicted in a way that emphasizes his lack of care. As Kepplinger et al. (1989) dictate, using an evaluative tone as seen above can impact the way the public views political figures. *Yeni Düzen* make similar statements, the language used is much less hateful/absolute in tone, however, they highlight similar shortcomings of the candidate Christodoulides:

> Although Christodoulides sometimes refers to the idea of a common federal state to be established on the basis of political equality with the Cypriot peoples, he does not favor this solution formula in essence. He does not endorse the active participation of Turkish Cypriots in federal bodies. It is not a coincidence that DISI found support from the nationalist wing, as well as DIKO, DIMAR and EDEK. (Opinion piece, *Yeni Düzen*, 5 February 2023).

Although the language is not as harsh or hateful as some examples of vilification that have been identified, the lack of care and genuinity is still highlighted. It is debatable whether the theme of vilification is a step too far, however, a negative/doubtful image of Christodoulides is still to be presented.

In another instance, although *Yeni Düzen* themselves do not vilify Christodoulides they highlight a moment in which DISY does: "Yes, most of the DISY members are angry and they label Christodoulides as a 'traitor' and 'turncoat'." (Opinion piece, *Yeni Düzen*, 6 February 2023). They do, however, comment on DISY (who Christodoulides gained some support from) as a party. This is an instance in which some absolute language is used by *Yeni Düzen*: "Because it is also a fact that most of the DISY members act with a thirst for revenge." (Opinion piece, *Yeni Düzen*, 5 February 2023). This is worth mentioning due to the fact that Christodoulides was previously a member of DISY and the foreign minister of the previous president of RoC (Nikos Anastasiades). Meaning, his candidacy went against his own party.

The most profound statement made by *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* was in response to the steps Christodoulides proposed for restarting negotiations with the assistance of the EU and UN which would involve the removal of Turkish troops from Cyprus. They respond to this by name calling all GsC (referring to them as Greeks): "Seriously, these Cyprus Greeks are so unique, different from all others, there's no one who does weird things better than them, same with dreaming." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 15 February 2023). There is not much to say about a statement like this, it speaks for itself. Wu and Shen (2020) highlight the fact that

negative news is seen as more powerful and has more influence on people's views. It can be assumed that this type of language would draw attention and have a bigger impact on the way Cypriots perceive one another.

On another note, *Avrupa* also vilifies certain actors in its articles. However, for them the villains in this case are certain candidates and Turkey (specifically their occupation of the northern part of Cyprus): "In the elections in the south, Christodoulides is seen as the strongest disciple of Makarios." (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 30 January 2023). Creating a link between Christodoulides and Makarios has a negative connotation for the TsC community. Makarios is remembered as the first president of Cyprus from 1960-1974 after gaining independence from Britain, who was in favor of enosis, and is accused of having common ground with EOKA. Although, Makarios' involvement and desire for enosis have been under questioning for many years. Nonetheless, the overall connotations are undoubtably negative.

In one column article (*Avrupa*) there was a specific point in which insulting language was used to mock Erdogan: "Tayyip Erdoğan also sings songs when the occasion arises... And he does it with that rotten voice of his" (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 3 February 2023). The lack of respect for and rejection of Erdogan is clear in this quote. Although it could be assumed that due to the negative language and tone this news could be viewed as more impactful (Wu & Shen, 2020) however, as they are not in the position of 'nationalist elites' (Ross & Alankuş, 2010), this may reduce their impact.

*Yeni Düzen*, which is a left-wing newspaper and pro-solution, does not explicitly vilify or favor a specific candidate, however, it is clear that it supports AKEL candidate, Mavroyiannis as evident in several opinion pieces. In *Yeni Düzen* there is an article that exclusively consists of an interview (in question-answer format) with Mavroyiannis in which he expresses his desires towards a united federal Cyprus titled: "Mavroyiannis 'dream of Cyprus" (Mavroyannis'in Kıbrıs hayali), with the subtitle "Sincere responses from Mavroyiannis" (Mavroyannis'den samimi yanıtlar). Clearly, a positive tone is being used to discuss Mavroyiannis 'stance and views. In the article the first paragraph highlights specific words from Mavroyiannis during the interview:

> One of the important figures in the election, independent candidate and former negotiator Andreas Mavroyiannis, supported by AKEL, said, "We must ensure that the solution and peace are beneficial to everyone." … Mavroyiannis, who emphasized the importance of political equality for Turkish Cypriots, said, "My vision and the moment I imagine is when Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot

athletes will come together in the Olympics to form the Cyprus team. (Opinion piece, *Yeni Düzen*, 30 January 2023).

## 4.3 Pessimism and Blame Games: The Status-quo as a Dead-end

The theme of vilification is further strengthened by the instances of blame towards certain actors regarding the lack of a solution to the Cyprus problem. Through blaming individuals, organizations, and countries, feelings of pessimism are expressed across the newspapers. Through responsibility framing, accountability and blame is being pushed onto specific individuals (Nikos Christodoulides), groups (Greek Cypriots), or in this case countries (Turkey), thereby focusing on the consequences of their actions or decisions (Borah, 2016). *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* often employed what Borah (2016) refers to as human interest framing as well, by playing on personal narratives and emotional dimensions. In their reports *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* and *Avrupa* tend to perpetuate not only vilification but also the us/them dynamic (although towards completely different actors) by blaming an actor in the equation. This is not observed in *Yeni Düzen*. The themes of the us/them dichotomy, vilification, and pessimism come together in a way that is expressed through blame: "The intention of the Greeks is to count the Cyprus Turks as nothing" and "I defend that the Greeks do not want a real partnership with us." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 4 February 2023). Here again very definitive language is being used to put all the blame on the GsC community. Essentially, the message being conveyed is 'they' don't want 'us' (Reicher & Hopkin, 2001). *Avrupa* also participates in presenting blame for an actor, however, they focus their blame on the occupier (Turkey). Here they are referring to the case in which RoC requests to restart negotiations:

> Turkey will find ways to run away from this too. … Turkey doesn't lose anything from not Taking part in negotiations, they see no harm. On the contrary, by extending the duration of occupation they are gaining time and become even more rooted here. (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 3 February 2023).

Here they are referring to Turkey's role in the continuation of a divided and occupied Cyprus. It is clear that *Avrupa* focuses on the wrong-doings and roles of the occupier (Turkey) in the division, whereas *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* chooses to blame the GsC community. *Avrupa* stresses their dissatisfaction with Turkey's increased intervention:

They made it even easier to obtain Turkish citizenship. They don't like our education system, claiming it is flawed and inadequate! For this reason, they are sending us new textbooks and new teachers. They frequently summon our ministers to Ankara and give them new instructions. Turkish Cypriots have been completely marginalized. (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 3 February 2023).

The discourse surrounding the resolution of the Cyprus issue and elections in general has exhibited an overtly pessimistic tone in the articles studied. There is an overwhelming number of quotes portraying the pessimistic tone in the newspapers. Şahin (2014) shed light on findings regarding the impacts of such pessimistic reporting and how this can impact peace-building and narratives of division. These pessimistic tones are conveyed through disappointment, loss of hope, helplessness due to occupation, doubtfulness, the perception that actions are performative and lack of trust for authorities and actors such as the UN, the EU, and the RoC. However, depending on the newspaper the root of their pessimism is quite different.

For *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, they are pessimistic as they believe the presidential candidates are and will continue to hinder their chances of further connecting to the occupier, whereas *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen* are concerned with the contrary; Turkey will continue to strengthen their ties, leaders will continue to not put forth genuine efforts towards a solution resulting in the connection to Cypriotism being lost. This pessimistic tone is not only directed towards the general conflict in Cyprus but also towards the presidential elections, due to the perception that regardless of the outcome the conflict will proceed, or a desired outcome will not be reached. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* once again conveys this in a very absolute and almost aggressive tone, while still refusing to recognize the RoC:

Regardless of who is the new president of the Greek Cypriot Administration, it is certain that the Greek side will never accept the Cyprus Turks as a sovereign people and an equal partner in this context. … But whoever is elected, can there be a change in the Greek side's stance on the solution of the Cyprus issue? NO... IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN. ... Let them write the names of Nikos Christodoulides, Averof Neofitu, and Andreas Mavroyiannis on pieces of paper, put them in a bingo bag, shake it up. ... Then call a child and ask them to pull one out. ... It doesn't matter whose name comes out. (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 15 February 2023)

No matter which leader wins in the South, they don't have the power to *TAK*e
the Cyprus issue out of the freezer. (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 3 February 2023).

Once again homogenizing not only the candidates but the GsC community at large. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* proceed by sharing their belief that none of the political parties are interested in or have shown efforts towards wanting a change to the current situation: "Common homeland, common future, fighting together under the same roof is not possible according to the constitution. No one, including AKEL in the South, has had any intention or effort to find this situation negative and change it." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 1 February 2023). This is contrary to *Yeni Düzen* who thinks AKEL is the only way forward:

The party that *TAK*es the clearest stance on a federal solution is AKEL. AKEL
is the only party that displays a determined stance towards peaceful coexistence
with Turkish Cypriots and the implementation of sovereignty and power sharing
based on political equality. (Opinion piece, *Yeni Düzen*, 5 February 2023)

Both *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* and *Avrupa* make clear their lack of hope through highlighting the intractable nature of the conflict, emphasizing the number of years they have had to 'wait':

Forty-nine or sixty, it doesn't matter. How many more years will our people have
to wait? The essential thing is the answer to this question... The rest is just
nonsense. ... These things don't happen overnight. ... Forty years is not a short
enough time to be called "overnight." (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 17
February 2023) and "In fact, everyone on both sides of the island is thirsty for
justice. They are tired of corruption and theft. Wouldn't it be enough if whoever
is elected *TAK*es care of this? Let Cyprus wait, so be it. Hasn't it already gotten
used to waiting? (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 5 February 2023)

*Yeni Düzen* stipulates, similar to the others, that the situation in Cyprus has come to a deadlock: "Although the "Makarios-Grivas supporters" division inherited from the past continues on a rhetorical level, Cypriot Greek state nationalism, whether it is Makarios-

leaning or includes individuals with EOKA B origins, has become the common ideology of all political parties." (Opinion piece, *Yeni Düzen*, 5 February 2023)

It can be observed that a substantial part of this pessimistic tone comes from the distrust in authority/leaders and their intentions, this includes the incumbent president (Nikos Christodoulides, the UN, Turkey, and the EU. This is in line with previous research by Doyle and Sambanis (2011) who state that the genuinity behind efforts put forth by authorities/leaders regarding the Cyprus problem is often questioned and debated. This lack of trust in authority also contributes to or even creates the need to blame these actors for a lack of a solution. The lack of trust in authority/intentions was a point of common ground among the newspapers. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* make statements about the fact that outside forces do not have any intention to/do not want a solution to the Cyprus problem:

> The recent UN Security Council resolution also demonstrated that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council do not want a solution in Cyprus. … FOREIGN POWERS, ESPECIALLY THE BRITISH, DO NOT WANT THE CYPRUS ISSUE TO BE RESOLVED. WHY? BECAUSE IF THE TURKISH AND GREEK SIDES IN CYPRUS REACH AN AGREEMENT, IT WILL INEVITABLY BRING INTO QUESTION THE CONTINUATION OF THEIR BASES IN CYPRUS, AND BRITAIN WILL DEFINITELY SUFFER FROM THIS. THE GREEKS ALSO EXPLOIT THIS TO PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF THE IMPASSE. (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 15 February 2023).

*Avrupa* present their shock and disbelief with the influence of foreign intervention: "Even though I still believe that Christodoulides will win the election, I will never forget these days in which I witnessed firsthand how external intervention is carried out in a democratic country in a horrifying manner." (Opinion piece, *Avrupa*, 10 February 2023) The following quote encompasses the interplay between the us/them narrative, pessimistic tone, and vilification portrayed by *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*:

> CHRISTODOULIDES has managed to align with the original EOKA members, namely the Makarios supporters (DIKO and EDEK), EOKA-B members, and the new EOKA members (ELAM) in Southern Cyprus after a long time. Why? Because the Greeks do not have any intention of finding a solution. ... Their

intentions are to drive Turkey out of Cyprus, create a rift between us and Turkey, and seek 'revenge'. (Opinion piece, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 13 February 2023).

Although the reason for conveying pessimism among these newspapers may be drastically different, the reality is that everyone is pessimistic for one reason or another. A common point between the papers is their lack of trust in authority and their hopelessness towards genuine efforts from leaders. This leads to them highlighting shortcomings and wrong-doings of the presidential candidate Nikos Christodoulides and well as Turkey. As can be seen, the political standing of the newspaper has a great impact on the tone and language news/opinions are reported in (Çatal, 2006).

# 5. Conclusion

This thesis sought to answer the research question: How did the Turkish-Cypriot media represent the 2023 Greek-Cypriot Presidential elections?" In pursuit of this aim, the study investigated also the following sub-question," How and in what ways was national identity represented in the TC media coverage of the 2023 Greek-Cypriot Presidential elections and what implications does this have for peace-building?" In doing so, it examined 79 articles in 5 newspapers with varying political stances, Taking the qualitative approach of thematic analysis.

## 5.1 Main Findings

The ways in which the presidential elections were presented varied greatly depending on which newspaper was examined. This was expected as media outlets often reflect the interests of the owners, which varied based on their political standing (Çatal, 2006). To summarize the presentation of each candidate within the different newspapers; for *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* the candidates (and GsC) have been homogenized and irrespective of their campaigns they are presented in a negative light, *Avrupa* neither favored nor rejected Mavroyiannis but did express concerns regarding Christodoulides, and *Yeni Düzen* expressed a clear favoring of Mavroyiannis over Christodoulides and brought to light his short-comings. None of the newspapers mentioned their opinions on candidates besides Nikos Christodoulides and Andreas Mavroyiannis. Other candidates were only mentioned in cases where the percentage of votes they obtained in the two rounds of elections was being discussed. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* homogenized not only the candidates but also the GsC community as a whole, thus irregardless of whether an article was specifically referencing the candidates or not they frame the GsC community in a negative light focusing on their past wrong-doings. This is in line with Borah's (2016) framing theory. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* tended to focus on 1974 and exclude cultural commonalities and the communal past. They par*TAK*e in the three forms of framing that Borah (2016) outlines, including conflict framing, responsibility framing, and human-interest framing.

The newspapers were able to show their views on the candidates mainly through vilifying certain candidates. The act of vilifying the candidates was carried out through the use of tone and language as well as framing and agenda setting. Tone and language have a huge impact on the way individuals receive and evaluate news (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Wu & Shen, 2020). More specifically, negative news media bias can lead to polarization. The

news reports surrounding the candidate Nikos Christodoulides were undoubtably negative across the newspapers. While Mavroyiannis gained praise from *Yeni Düzen* and did not receive much backlash or negative reporting, as with the Christodoulides, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* had nothing positive to say about him. However, this was expected as they showed a generally negative perspective towards the candidates, the elections, GsC, and RoC in general. On the other hand, *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen*'s vilifications were mainly directed at Christodoulides and the occupier (Turkey).

Additionally, it seems that the TC media does indeed follow the Mediterranean/polarized pluralist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Broadly, the Mediterranean/polarized pluralist model asserts that the strength of the conservative forces in southern Europe and more specifically the Mediterranean region "has ensured that politics would be polarized and conflictual." (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 129). It is characterized by involvement in political conflict, dependence on state, political parties, and limited development of journalism as an independent profession (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This is seen in TC media; newspapers are clearly divided based on political party and are very much dependent on the state. As mentioned earlier, a majority of articles that are published (excluding opinion pieces) are all extracted from *TAK*. As Şahin (2022) documented from a personal interview "In Cyprus we have not moved to digital journalism properly. Neither the infrastructure nor the news production process has changed. We haven't made a radical transformation…." (Şahin, 2022, p. 164). This is in line with the findings.

The study's interest in national identities has been answered. Specifically, throughout the investigation of these newspapers the complex identity issues and dilemmas that TsC's face, also outlined by Şahin (2011), are very prominent. As previously mentioned, the people of Cyprus, and particularly TsC grapple with the search for a definitive identity having to choose between being Turkish, Turkish Cypriot, Greek, Greek Cypriot, and Europeans. These identities were clearly present and conveyed through the different news channels. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* seemed to hold onto a Turkish nationalist identity and stress their ties/connections with Turkey. Whereas *Yeni Düzen* seemed to most often identify with the Turkish Cypriot identity, while stressing ties with Cyprus. *Avrupa* on the other hand, made no distinction and presented identity as Cypriot, stressing ties with Cyprus as a whole (including the GsC community) (Vural & Rüstemli, 2006). Although *Yeni Düzen* did not make any direct reference to ties with the GsC community, they also did not make any explicit statements to convey a lack of connection either. The complex identity struggles present in Cyprus were easily visible through examining these newspapers. The shift from a collective identity to

nationalism that Vural and Rüstemli (2006) pinpointed can give some explanation to the way *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* presented identity. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* seems to hold onto this historical shift to 'Cyprus is Turkish and 'Cyprus is Greek'. This narrative was created in response to GC nationalism, which emphasized 'Turkishness but also asserting their attachment to the geographical territory of Cyprus, which includes 'Cypriotness as part of their identity, However, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* has *TAK*en this a step forward and appears to completely detach from the Cypriot identity and rather solely stress their links to Turkey and 'Turkishness'. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* plays on the fear that Sahin (2008) outlined as the fear of losing 'our' identity through disseminating old myths and stereotypes, while *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen* also express fear of losing touch with 'our' identity they stress the loss of Cypriotism as opposed loss of connection to the occupier.

While *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* stresses 'Turkishness', *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen* stress a collective Cypriot identity. Treating individuals equally contributes to a sense of legitimacy, resulting in individual and collective value. Thus, recognition of one's worth and the protection of collective identity are essential for fostering co-existence and peacebuilding (Moshe, 2001), It can be argued that *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen* are promoting co-existence and working towards re-fostering a collective identity. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* is doing the opposite by encouraging division by addressing half of the island as 'other.' This is actually in line with the political agendas they are pushing. It is clear how the identity being presented by *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* impacts the way they treat and present the 'other' which is outlined by Reicher and Hopkins (2001). *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* desires a two-state solution, thus the use of divisive language and emphasis on ties with Turkey 'makes sense'. As Reicher and Hopkins (2001) indicated, the categorization of identity may produce general principles on how the 'other 'is treated and may conduct themselves towards the other based on the way they impact their collective interest. When national interest is enhanced the 'other 'is accepted, this is seen in *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen*, as they support a federal one state solution, their acceptance for the GsC community is in line with their national interests and goal for a collective Cypriot identity. Whereas *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* feels threatened by the other as their political aims are based on the premise of partition. Additionally, Billig (1995) outlines that a focus on 'local' and 'foreign' divide within media can add to feelings of national community. *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* and *Yeni Düzen* have divided news about RoC and TRNC on their webpages by creating separate categories, by doing so they are unable to create a sense of national community among TsC and GsC since they are in fact the 'local' and 'foreign.' Whereas *Avrupa* puts all

Cypriots (TsC and GsC) in the position of the 'local' and Turkey, EU, and the UN as the 'foreign.'

As previously mentioned, the tone and language of an article can lead to polarization and impact views on political figures (Kepplinger et al. 1989; Wu & Shen, 2020). It could be assumed that the negative/pessimistic tone within all the newspapers can lead to further polarization within Cypriot society. Particularly, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, not only portray a pessimist tone but also use aggressive, mocking, and very absolute phrases to explain the current situation in Cyprus. Particularly, when referring to Nikos Christodoloudes, *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* employs an almost bully-like stance. Not only do these negative portrayals of the candidate lead to an overall pessimistic view of the candidate himself but also GsC community in general, especially since *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* rarely makes distinctions within the community but rather group everyone into the label of 'Greek'. While *Avrupa* and *Yeni Düzen* also point towards particular wrong-doings of Christodoulides in the past, yet their claims are backed by evidence and they use a more neutral tone, putting less stress on identity differences and rather focus on particular actions. As Keppinger et al. (1989) state, using an evaluative tone when reporting news concerning political figures can impact the way individuals evaluate the candidate. This, in combination with the fact that news media *TAK*es on a negative tone leading to possible polarization, indicates that *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, in comparison to the other newspapers, *TAK*es the most active role in perpetuating division, particularly on ethnic lines. Given that the dynamics of electoral competition already contribute to the prominence of subnational identifications (Lieberman & Miller, 2021), adding a negative tone while evaluating it can be assumed that the manner in which *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* reports their news further perpetuates divisions once again. Additionally, the focus on ethnic differences can lead to more hostile schemas in the viewers brains (Lieberman & Miller, 2021).

Doyle and Sambanis (2011) ascertain the lack of trust for authority figures and foreign powers involved in the Cyprus problem. Through this analysis that claim was confirmed. *Yeni Düzen*, *Avrupa*, and *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* all portray their distrust and doubt towards the UN peacekeeping forces. Where they differ is that *Yeni Düzen* and *Avrupa* also indicate their distrust for Turkey, whereas *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* emphasized their distrust for the 'other '(GsC, according to them). Overall, on the lines of peace-building it can be summarized that the right-wing paper (*Kıbrıs Gazetesi*) plays a detrimental role in the peace-building process. Through perpetuating stereotypes, disseminating false information and reinforcing prejudices (Şahin, 2022) it can be argued that *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* is exacerbating conflict and division. Whereas *Yeni Düzen* and *Avrupa* seem to be contributing towards the

producing, transmitting, and constructing of narratives that contribute to the discursive formation of a shared sense of identity (Ross & Alankuş, 2010). This shared sense of identity can theoretically provoke co-existence (Moshe, 2001).

In conclusion, the analysis of Turkish Cypriot newspapers during the 2023 presidential elections reveals the complex identity issues faced by the Turkish Cypriot community. The newspapers' representation of identity varied confirming existing literature, with *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* emphasizing a Turkish nationalist identity and strong ties to Turkey, *Yeni Düzen* stressing the Turkish Cypriot identity and ties to Cyprus, and *Avrupa* presenting a collective Cypriot identity inclusive of the GsC community. The shift to nationalism, as observed in *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, reflects the historical dynamics in Cyprus and what was considered to be a response to Greek Cypriot nationalism. On the other hand, *Yeni Düzen* and *Avrupa* promote a collective Cypriot identity, contributing to a sense of legitimacy, individual and collective value, and potentially fostering co-existence. The use of language and tone also plays a significant role, with *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* employing a negative and aggressive tone that can contribute to polarization, while *Yeni Düzen* and *Avrupa* use a more neutral tone and focus on specific actions rather than identity differences. Additionally, the analysis highlights the general lack of trust in authority figures and foreign powers involved in the Cyprus problem, with varying levels of distrust expressed towards the UN peacekeeping forces and Turkey. In general, when it comes to the candidates, oftentimes they were vilified, with the exception of Mavroyannis. Overall, while *Kıbrıs Gazetesi* exacerbates conflict and division in their articles regarding the 'other', *Yeni Düzen* and *Avrupa* contribute to the formation of a shared sense of identity, highlighting some positives that have the potential to foster co-existence and peacebuilding.

This research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on media in divided societies and the media-nationalism nexus. By examining the intricate relationship between media and nationalism within TC news media, this research sheds light on the ways in which media can either exacerbate or mitigate divisions within a society. Overall, this study's contribution to the literature on media in divided societies and the media-nationalism nexus is valuable, it provides an overview of the current representation and identities present within TC news media and TRNC in general. This understanding is necessary in order for policymakers and scholars that seek to navigate the challenges posed by media in divided societies.

## 5.2 Future Research

The present analysis provides valuable insights into the complex identity issues and divisive narratives within the Turkish Cypriot newspaper, as depicted during the 2023 presidential elections in Cyprus. However, there are several avenues for further research that could enhance our understanding of this topic. One reasonable suggestion for future investigation would be to explore different time periods using the same theoretical framework. While this analysis focused on the 2023 elections, examining earlier periods of division or other political events in Cyprus could provide additional context and shed light on the persistence of identity struggles over time. Previous studies (Avraamidou, 2018; Christophorou, 2010; Şahin, 2014) have explored similar themes, yielding consistent findings, but a comprehensive analysis of different time periods could deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics. Moreover, it would be valuable to investigate the impact of the educational system on identity formation and peace-building efforts in Cyprus. Recognizing that younger generations play a crucial role in shaping the future of the country, understanding the role of education in perpetuating or mitigating divisions is essential. As education is often considered the foundation for socialization and the transmission of values, studying the curricula and narratives presented in classrooms could provide insights into how divisions are perpetuated and offer opportunities for intervention. Exploring the educational system as a potential source of division and examining strategies to prevent the perpetuation of divisive narratives would be a worthwhile avenue for future research. However, it is important to acknowledge that delving into the educational system's impact on peace-building may yield pessimistic findings, as the entrenched narratives and historical grievances are deeply ingrained in society. Overall, further research in these areas would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complex identity struggles in Cyprus and provide a basis for formulating evidence-based strategies for peace-building.

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# Appendix A: Turkish-Cypriot News Sites

| News Site | Translation |
|---|---|
| Yeni Düzen | New Order |
| Halkın Sesi | The People's Voice |
| Avrupa | Europe |
| Kıbrıs | Cyprus |
| BRTK-Bayrak Radyo Televizyon Kurumu | Flag Radio and Television Corporation |

# Appendix B: Turkish-Cypriot News Sites' Article Overview

| News Site | Political Standing | Total Number of Articles (29 January-18 February) | Number of column pieces | Average Number of Words per article heading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yeni Düzen | Left | 15 | 5 | 450 |
| Avrupa (previously known as Africa) | Left | 14 | 6 | 315 |
| Halkın Sesi | Center | 21 | 0 | 262 |
| BRTK | Right | 6 | 0 | 301 |
| Kıbrıs Gazetesi | Right | 23 | 10 | 426 |
| Total | | 79 | 21 | |

# Appendix C: Coding Table

| Codes | Initial Categories | Final Themes |
|---|---|---|
| • Greek(s)<br>• Greek Administration<br>• Greek side<br>• Turkish side<br>• South Cyprus<br>• North Cyprus<br>• Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus<br>• Republic of Cyprus<br>• Greek Cypriot<br>• Turkish Cypriot<br>• Turkish speaking Cypriots<br>• Greek speaking Cypriots<br>• Cyprus 'free side<br>• Occupied side<br>• Turkish invasion<br>• Cyprus peace operation | • Us: TsC, them/other: GsC, Turkish etc.<br>• Divided national identity | *Divided Cypriot Identity: The Us/Them dichotomy and instances of inclusion and exclusion* |
| • Unique<br>• Weird<br>• Careless<br>• Responsible for collapse of talks<br>• Resentful | • Vilification: of presidential candidates, RoC, GsC, and Turkey<br>• Blame: towards actors causing a lack of desired solution | *Vilification: Representing Presidential Candidates and foreign powers* |
| • Impossible nature<br>• Constant waiting<br>• Years of unsettlement<br>• Certainty about no solution<br>• No common ground<br>• Talk of Occupier<br>• Hopelessness<br>• Lack of possibility for change | • Pessimism: towards a desired solution to the Cyprus problem<br>• Distrust in authority/intentions | *Pessimism and blame games: The status-quo as a dead end* |