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Media Narratives of Ukrainian Migration in Bulgaria: A Thematic Analysis of Post-2022 Reporting

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Bachelor Thesis - Security Studies

*Media Narratives of Ukrainian Migration in Bulgaria: A Thematic
Analysis of Post-2022 Reporting*

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Bulgarian media outlets reported on the Ukrainian migration crisis following the 2022 Russian invasion. Grounded in securitization theory and media discourse studies, the research investigates the narratives constructed by major public outlets (BTV and NOVA) and independent media outlets. The research project uncovers how Ukrainian refugees were portrayed across different media platforms by conducting a qualitative thematic content analysis of 52 Bulgarian-language media articles, published between 2022 and 2025, as well as their respective photographic visuals.

The analysis identifies five central themes: victimization of migrants, securitization narratives, positive portrayal of migrants, representations of effective governance, and depictions of governance failures. These themes highlight the competing narratives that coexist within the Bulgarian media landscape, reflecting both humanitarian and threat-based framings. While public broadcasters showed higher levels of securitization and state-affirming discourse, independent outlets emphasized victimhood and policy critique more strongly. The findings suggest that media narratives were shaped not only by geopolitical context and public sentiment but also by institutional allegiances and Bulgaria's political instability during the researched period.

This research contributes to academic debates on securitization by demonstrating how media serve as both platforms and agents of discursive power. It offers insights into the dynamic interplay between state narratives, media freedom, and public discourse in post-communist contexts, and calls for further comparative and interdisciplinary research on media representations of forced migration.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The migration crisis that emerged after the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the start of 2022 has triggered one of the most significant refugee movements in modern European history (Murphy et al., 2022). In response, European Governments and the media have used various frames to portray the influx of Ukrainian refugees, with some emphasizing humanitarian assistance and others focusing on potential security risks (Iberi & Saddam, 2022). In this context, the media play a crucial role in shaping the public perception of the issue at hand by reporting on migration and the discourse of national political leaders. Given that migration is often politicized and securitized (Borbeau, 2011), it is crucial to understand how the narratives used in media can construct and reinforce these frames.

Bulgaria, which became a member of the European Union in 2007 (Noutcheva & Bechev, 2008), represents the southeasternmost edge of the union's border. This position makes Bulgaria a valuable asset and a crucial stakeholder in migration during the Ukraine invasion. The country has experienced a significant influx of refugees amid the war, with nearly 200,000 Ukrainian citizens entering the Balkan state as of April 18, 2022 (Koroutchev, 2023). However, compared to countries like Poland or Germany, Bulgaria has received relatively little academic attention concerning how media outlets within the country represent this migration and the use of securitizing discourse by political figures. Therefore, this study will investigate the role of Bulgarian media in shaping migration discourse by analyzing how the refugee influx from Ukraine post-2022 is reported and how national political leaders' discourse is portrayed in local outlets. The main research question guiding this research is as follows: ***“How do Bulgarian media outlets report on migration from Ukraine post-2022, and how do they represent national political discourse?”*** To further the analysis, the study will also consider whether these reports contribute to the overall concept of securitizing migration, providing depth to the research project. The data sources that this study will use will be media articles collected from the renowned public media outlets and independent news agencies. To facilitate a successful analysis, the research will employ a qualitative content analysis approach.

In essence, the primary aim of this study is embedded within the broader framework of securitization theory (Wæver, 1995), which explains how specific issues are framed as existential threats that necessitate extraordinary measures for mitigation or complete resolution. While previous studies on securitization and migration have primarily focused on Western European countries such as Germany, France, and the UK (Huysmans, 2006; Neal,

2009), the influence of Eastern European media in constructing migration narratives remains relatively unexplored. By concentrating on a country like Bulgaria, this study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the role of media in reporting on political discourse related to migration from Ukraine and the broader phenomenon.

This research is particularly relevant due to the state's complex geopolitical position within the EU (Mihaylov, 2019), historical migration patterns (Mancheva & Troeva, 2011, Ch. 1), and its reputation for having the least media freedom in the EU (Reporters Without Borders)(Indzhov, 2024). Additionally, my familiarity with the country's society and the language being my native language will enable an in-depth analysis of local media discourse that might be inaccessible to non-Bulgarian-speaking scholars.

Existing literature demonstrates that media can play a key role in influencing political decisions, undermining the trust in government institutions, and shaping the public perception about issues such as migration (Baltov, 2022). Furthermore, studies on migration discourse show that media can amplify political rhetoric, influencing public attitudes and policy responses (Bourbeau, 2011). Applying these insights to the context of Bulgaria will help determine whether and how media in the country securitize migration from Ukraine, highlighting the mechanisms through which political narratives are delivered to the public.

Understanding media representations of migration is crucial for assessing societal responses to crises. In Bulgaria, securitized framings could influence both domestic policy debates and EU migration governance. Given the overlap between Ukrainian migration and Bulgaria's political crisis (Kaleynska, 2023), it is likely that media narratives were strategically constructed to influence public perception and benefit institutional legitimacy.

Following this chapter, the next one will focus on an overview of key research relevant to the topic at hand, scientific theories, and debates related to securitization theory and the role of media discourse. It will define key concepts and theories and situate the study within the existing literature on the topic of migration and securitization, which will facilitate the research's credibility and reliability.

The third chapter will focus on the design and methodology of the study. It will explain the choices that inspired the methodology selected for the analysis, as well as the case selection criteria. This chapter will justify and support the basis on which this research is built in terms of tools and methods that will be used to facilitate a successful and thorough thematic analysis. The key themes from the media analysis will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis, in addition to the way the Bulgarian media framed migration from Ukraine and the representation of political discourse.

Lastly, Chapter 5 will cover the conclusion and reflection. Its purpose will be to summarize the findings, discuss their implications and relevance to answering the main research question, reflect on the study's limitations, and suggest directions for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter will focus on providing an overview of the key academic debates, theories, and research findings that lie at the base of the field of securitization of migration and media representation. The literature review will aim to present, analyze, and situate this research within broader discussions on securitization theory, political discourse, media, and migration studies. Furthermore, this chapter will contribute to outlining the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis of Bulgarian media narratives on migration from Ukraine in the post-2022 war period.

2.1 Migration in the Global Context

Migration, more specifically forced migration, has become one of the most relevant themes in modern history, primarily due to its relevance to policy and politics (Reed et al., 2016). The securitization of migration has been a significant focus of academic discussions, particularly in Europe, where migration is frequently framed as a security concern rather than a humanitarian issue. Huysmans (2006) explores how migration governance in Europe has been deeply influenced by narratives fostering securitization, where migrants are often seen as potential threats to national security, social stability, and economic resources. Such framing, reinforced by political rhetoric and media narratives, can contribute to restrictive immigration policies and a more sensitive approach to the crisis.

On one hand, a crucial dimension of global migration studies that needs to be considered is the impact of migration on social security systems. According to a study on migration processes in Europe, policies targeting migration are often developed in response to economic concerns, such as welfare state sustainability and labor market demands (Ivanov, 2023). In their work, Ivanov (2023) highlights that while migrants can contribute to economic growth, public discourse frequently focuses on the perceived burden they impose on social services, which can further reinforce securitization narratives.

On the other hand, migration governance in the European Union has been increasingly shaped by security-oriented narratives, thus influencing policy frameworks both on the

supranational and national levels (Neal, 2009). They argue that the process of institutionalization of migration securitization in the EU has led to a shift in which migration is no longer perceived as a socioeconomic or humanitarian issue but rather a security concern. This process is deeply rooted in political discourse and policy mechanisms, where migration is constructed as a potential threat that requires extraordinary measures (Neal, 2009; Wæver, 1995). Neal (2009) argues that such securitization tendencies at the EU level inevitably influence member states by shaping their national immigration policies, political, and media narratives.

Another crucial argument about the nature of migration and the way it is securitized in the global context is made by Innes (2024). Their argument is based on the idea that recent securitization theory has not dealt with the concepts of race and racism, which can be seen as problematic for the concept of migration. Furthermore, they argue that racialization is embedded in the structure of state systems, which can be seen to facilitate the establishment of stronger and more lasting securitization narratives for migration.

Considering the existing literature on the global concept of migration and the way it can be securitized, this research will take into account relevant points such as social, economic, political, and racial drivers for this process. This will ensure a strong base for the analysis of the sources and achieving the main objective of the study itself. However, an analysis of migration in the context of Bulgaria is necessary to achieve a better overview of the narrow scope in the base of this research and understand the underlying information relevant to migration in the country.

2.2 Securitization Theory

The concept of securitization provides an important theoretical framework for understanding how migration can be framed as a security threat. The Copenhagen School of Security Studies and the work of Wæver (1995) manage to provide a basis for what can be understood as securitization - the process through which political actors construct a certain issue as an existential threat that requires extraordinary measures. According to this definition, security is perceived as a speech act that allows for the reconfiguration of political priorities and the establishment of legitimate exceptional responses to threats. Furthermore, securitization based on Wæver's view (1995) follows three crucial steps: (1) identification of an existential threat, (2) emergency action, and (3) effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free of rules (Taureck, 2006).

The outline of the theory by Wæver (1995) has triggered the emergence of new and different understandings of securitization, including new characteristics and criteria for the concept. As argued by Taureck (2006), a central component of this theory is the role of power and authority in determining which issues become securitized. They argue that securitization is not a process but is mostly shaped by those with the social and political capability to define threats. This underscores the view on the nature of the concept as elite-driven, where dominant figures and institutions possess the legitimacy and power to successfully construct issues such as migration as existential. By doing so, they can influence both public perceptions and policy measures, thus reinforcing narratives of exclusion and restrictive migration policies.

Another take on defining securitization has been provided by Balzacq (2011, Ch.1). In their book, the author outlines the concept with the insight that no issue is inherently a security measure but rather, something that becomes a security problem through discursive politics. This definition highlights the constructed nature of security threats, as it emphasizes that issues can be framed as an existential danger not because of the inherent risk they carry but through rhetorical and political strategies. According to Balzacq (2011, Ch.1), the securitization process relies on specific actors' ability to shape discourse in a way that can push an audience to accept the extraordinary measures as necessary.

Hampson et al. (1998) provide an expansion to the already established concept of securitization by Wæver (1995). In their reconstruction of the theory, the authors define it as the phenomenon during which an issue is presented as an existential threat that requires emergency measures in addition to the justification of actions outside of the normal bounds of political measures. Building on the base provided by Wæver (1995), the scholars highlight the boundaries that the concept of securitization transcends and the purpose it can serve to dominant figures in the political arena, when establishing necessity in threat management.

After reviewing several academic conceptualizations of securitization theory, the following conclusion can be drawn. The existing literature on the concept is broad and includes varying definitions and criteria as to what constructs securitization. However, it is made clear by the discussed scholars that all of them acknowledge the work by Wæver (1995) as a universal base to the concept. This study will take into consideration the different extensions to understanding the purpose and capabilities of securitization in the field of security studies, such as the power and authority components (Taureck, 2006) or the role of discursive politics in constructing a threat (Balzacq, 2011, Ch. 1). Still, the universal nature of the concept provided by Wæver (1995) will be essential for this research and its purpose of

uncovering how media outlets in Bulgaria report on the migration following the War in Ukraine of 2022.

2.3 Migration and Media in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a country located in eastern-central Europe and serves as a crossing point and a transitional zone between Western Europe, the Near and the Middle East, and the Mediterranean region (Dimitrov, 2015). This complex geographical location puts the country in a pivotal position in the region, as it serves the purpose of the southeasternmost border of the European Union, as well as a proximity to territories of conflict such as Ukraine (Dimitrov, 2015). Its geographical location makes the country a relevant and valuable stakeholder when considering the migration waves triggered by the War in Ukraine, as Bulgaria faced a strong influx of refugees in the first months after the start of the conflict (Koroutchev, 2023).

As an EU border nation, Bulgaria has received noticeable waves of migration triggered by various conflicts and crises throughout the years. In their study, Mancheva and Troeva (2011, Ch.1) discuss the way migration in the state has evolved alongside the broader socio-political transformations within the country and the region. The authors note the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 as a pivotal moment in the Balkan State's migration history, as it triggered both large-scale emigration and the gradual emergence of immigration trends (Mancheva & Troeva, 2011, Ch.1). However, they argue that while scholars have tried to identify different aspects of Bulgaria's migration trends, there is no well justified periodization of migration process and no comprehensive discussion on aspects that influence it such as demographical, social, economic and cultural.

The relatively recent events of the War in Ukraine have also been marked in the Migration Policy Report of the Republic of Bulgaria by Petkov (2023). In his work, the author presents an overview of the current state of migration policy on a strategic level by analyzing the migration streams of the last five years. The document concludes with an analysis of the future strategies for the period of 2021 - 2025. Petkov (2023) states that the number of immigrants in Bulgaria has been significantly lower despite the major refugee wave that has been going on in 2015 and 2016. Statistical data show that in the period of five years (2016 - 2021), the Balkan state saw the number of immigrants plummet. However, in the following years, the emergence of global crises such as the Wars in Northern Africa and the invasion of Ukraine led to a new migrant wave in the country, which saw over 200,000

individuals looking for international protection in 2022 alone. The report concludes by establishing the need to rethink and reconstruct the existing migration strategy and policies triggered by the new emerging migration waves on an international scale (Petkov, 2023). Overall, their work offers an overview of the current political landscape in Bulgaria regarding migration and presents how the country deals with complex issues such as immigration.

The migration waves from Ukraine that hit the Bulgarian borders have triggered different reactions from institutions and people. The media in the country, for instance, has been universally tasked with reporting and portraying the new information and trends that are circulating the public space, as well as the processes that are surrounding Bulgaria in particular. In their work on alternative media discourse used regarding refugee waves in the Balkan state, Baltov (2022) explores the way media and its narrative portray the migration crisis that has hit Bulgaria both during the Syrian and Ukrainian refugee waves. They argue that the media did not remain impartial to the immigration processes in the country, as they have been working towards undermining the policies for the integration of refugees (Baltov, 2022). Furthermore, the media have represented the migrant waves as a source of social injustice and various social and security risks to the country and its people.

While this research successfully analyzes media discourse in the context of migration, the publication year is rather close to the start of the war in Ukraine which limits the relevance of it as in the two-and-a-half years since its publication the conflict has changed rapidly as has migration, which can be considered to have altered the perception and the media representation of the conflict and its aftermath drastically. Furthermore, in recent years, Bulgaria has been ranking at the lowest end of the Reporters Without Borders (RWB) World Press Freedom Index (Indzhov, 2024), as the country was ranked 70th in 2010, but ended 2021 ranked 112. This statistic advocates for the critical situation in which the media in Bulgaria is positioned, as it is constantly influenced by the government or specific political figures and oligarchs that corrupt its nature and purpose.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methods

This chapter will explore and outline the research design and methods that have been chosen to carry out the purpose of the project. It will first focus on the design of the study and choices made in regards to its structure and purpose. The following section will provide an overview of the methods that were chosen to serve the needs of the research, focusing on data

collection methods and coding of the gathered sources to uncover the hidden themes and patterns.

This study investigates the migration waves from Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022 and how the media report on them, particularly in the Bulgarian context. The research will explore how different media outlets frame migration-related narratives and the thematic patterns that emerge within these representations. Furthermore, by analyzing the narrative used in Bulgarian media reporting, this project will consider if and how these narratives contribute to the overall idea of securitizing migration.

This study adopts a qualitative research design to effectively analyze contextual data and identify key patterns in media representations. Drawing on Yang (2014, Ch.10), qualitative research is described as an interpretative, naturalistic approach focused on understanding phenomena in their natural context through the meanings people assign to them, producing findings derived from qualitative rather than statistical methods. This broader definition justifies the choice of such a design as it supports the aim of this research project of exploring media narrative construction and its social implications by uncovering hidden themes and patterns in the portrayal of migration.

More specifically, thematic content analysis will be used to examine the selected media texts. This type of analysis allows the researcher to identify or develop patterns of meaning, also referred to as themes, that are tied to a specific set of data, and these themes will then be used to organize, describe, or interpret reality. (Stevens, 2023, Ch.10). Based on this definition, this specific method will allow for a systematic categorization of themes and narratives that emerge in media coverage of migration. It aligns with the study's objective of exploring how migration is framed and possibly constructed as a security issue in media discourse in the country of focus.

This research project will follow the thematic analysis layout proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2022), in agreement with the one offered in the work of Stevens (2023). In their view, the analytical process is divided into six steps: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) refining, defining, and naming themes, and (6) writing the report. Considering this, the research will focus the coding on the three-step approach outlined by Stevens (2023), which begins by reducing the raw text into a set of meaningful codes or labels, followed by concentrating on a particular set of codes and exploring their relationships, and concluding by synthesizing the final network of codes and their relation to the research and its aims. This

process will contribute to the research's replicability and credibility, as it presents a viable outline for a well-structured analysis that will follow in the next chapter of this study.

This research employed inductive coding, meaning that the researcher identifies meaningful text segments and creates labels that assign meaning to them (Thomas, 2006). This approach benefits the aim of the research of uncovering key aspects of the way Ukrainian immigration is represented in Bulgarian media. As Thomas (2006) notes, inductive coding is ideal for deriving themes from raw data. Therefore, to conduct a successful and productive coding process, this project will apply three rounds of coding. The first round will focus on breaking down the raw data into smaller samples, reading through them, and uncovering the initial patterns that emerge. Progressing from sample to sample, the themes and patterns identified will inform the analysis of subsequent samples, allowing for the discovery of additional patterns in the texts that do not fit within the established initial thoughts. This will facilitate the creation of new codes, and the process will continue until all data has been analyzed. The second round of the coding process will concentrate on assigning meaning and labels to the initial codes and reapplying them to determine if they still align with the researcher's initial thoughts. Building on this, the third round will apply the double-filtered labels to determine if they belong to specific groups based on their meaning and operationalization within the data. Additionally, this research will also apply the final codes to the imagery presented in the articles, providing further depth to the study and potentially uncovering new patterns or themes.

This research project used non-probability sampling, which involves establishing specific criteria to guide and streamline data collection (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). For this project, keywords such as "migration," "Ukrainian refugees/migration," and "immigration in Bulgaria" were used to filter relevant media sources and exclude unrelated topics like European Migration Policy. A defined time frame - from the initial refugee wave that hit the country, to the latest reports - further shaped the sample, enabling the identification of evolving themes during a period of political instability and governmental uncertainty in Bulgaria (Kaleynska, 2023).

The primary unit of analysis in this research is media texts, specifically news articles and reports on Ukrainian migrants and political discourse from major public and independent Bulgarian outlets. Wimmer et al. (2011, Ch.1) identify four key themes that shaped mass media research: World War I and propaganda studies, the rise of media advertising in the 1950s-60s, growing public concern with media effects, and increasing competition among media platforms. Based on these key events, the author argues that media research has been

shaped primarily by the needs of the public, and now this competitiveness is the main driver of media research. Therefore, including both independent and mainstream media outlets in the data collection and analysis will enhance the depth and credibility of this research project.

Building upon that, this research focuses on Bulgarian-language sources, analyzing a total of 52 media articles. The primary data comes from major public outlets, NOVA News and BTV News, which have dominated Bulgaria's media landscape over the past fifteen years. To enrich the analysis, articles from independent media have also been included, offering alternative views which might be less influenced by the political instability in the country during the 2022 - 2023 period (Kaleynska, 2023). The coding process and the analysis were conducted in the researcher's native language, as this was crucial for uncovering patterns and themes present in the texts, which could have been altered or misinterpreted if the texts were translated into English. However, the codebook, the codes themselves, and the written component of the analysis that will follow this chapter will be addressed and translated to provide an insightful and comprehensive explanation of the findings and their significance for the project's objectives.

Since this study involves publicly available media content, the ethical risks are minimal, as media research has exponentially grown and established itself as a crucial part of the academic research environment (Wimmer et al., 2011). However, to ensure accurate representation of media narratives and avoid misinterpretation of journalistic intent, this research has been conducted with great care and in alignment with the pre-established ethical guidelines related to qualitative research and the specific requirements of the study. The results from the coding process of this project will be presented in a dedicated code book, which can be found in Appendix A. Furthermore, this research project will adhere to the core values of qualitative research, including transparency in data collection and analysis processes.

Chapter 4 - Research Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the main findings and analysis derived from the data collection process will be presented in the next subsections, each focusing on a separate theme that emerged during the analysis. This way, the findings derived from the data can be interpreted and applied to the respective media outlets to uncover patterns in reporting. Furthermore, this approach will allow for a better understanding of the uncovered underlying themes in the media reports, as it allows more focus on the patterns rather than the outlets themselves. The

said themes and the respective codes that they are comprised of are displayed in a codebook that can be found in Appendix A of this research project, as well as all their definitions, examples of application. This section will aim to uncover the hidden patterns and themes incorporated in the media narrative to understand how they report and represent Ukrainian migration in Bulgaria since the start of the War in 2022.

4.1 Theme 1 - Victimization of Migrants

According to Zatz and Smith (2012), immigrants are usually highly vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation. This theme captures the way Ukrainian migrants were portrayed as vulnerable individuals who faced significant hardships and their dependency on humanitarian support. It creates a narrative in which refugees are seen as victims of circumstances beyond their control, shaping them as people in need of sympathy and assistance. Portrayals of Ukrainian migrants facing displacement, integration challenges, or general harms and crimes were the main focus of this pattern that emerged from the data analysis (Figure 2; Figure 3; Figure 4).

The findings related to this theme reveal that Ukrainian refugees were frequently portrayed as vulnerable individuals in the Bulgarian media landscape. This representation reflects Huysmans' (2006) argument that migration governance in Europe often blends securitization with humanitarian discourse, where migrants are simultaneously subjects of regulation and compassion. Furthermore, based on the work of Balzacq (2011), security threats are discursively constructed rather than inherent, which emphasizes that the media in Bulgaria chose to portray migrants as victims of conflict and displacement to reinforce the humanitarian perceptions.

In Bulgarian media, this was evident particularly in sources from independent media outlets and BTV news articles, while in NOVA, there was a relatively lower occurrence rate. The difference in the occurrence rates between outlets aligns with media freedom debates. Independent media, less politically dependent (Indzhov, 2024), emphasized humanitarian frames more strongly, while commercial outlets like NOVA reflected a slightly more restrained portrayal. A suitable quote from an independent source that captures the idea of the theme would be: "The people arriving by buses and cars were fleeing the horrors of war and needed everything - food, water, clothing, medicine, hygiene, psychological support, guidance in navigating the new surroundings, shelter, living necessities, money, and more." (Nikolova, 2024).

In the Bulgarian context, these findings extend the observations made by Baltov (2022) on the role of the media in influencing migration perceptions. While past migration crises in the country saw harsher portrayals, the case of Ukrainian migrants was depicted with more sympathy, reflecting broader cultural and political solidarities. Furthermore, BTV also reported a significant number of humanitarian-focused portrayals, despite its wider reach and potential political influences, while NOVA exhibited a notably lower occurrence, which can hint at editorial choices influenced by broader political or commercial considerations.

By reflecting on this theme, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how humanitarian narratives exist and compete within national media landscapes. It also highlights the importance of media as an active agent in shaping migration discourse, a phenomenon touched upon both by Baltov (2022) for Bulgaria and by broader European studies such as Neal (2009) and Huysmans (2006).

Thus, this theme not only illustrates a key finding of this study but also reinforces the theoretical foundation established in the second chapter of this research, showing that media representation can fluctuate between narratives depending on political, cultural, and situational factors.

4.2 Theme 2 - Securitization of Migration

Following the humanitarian portrayals explored in the previous section, the contrasting theme of the securitization of migration will be the main focus in this part. It is centered around portraying Ukrainian migrants as societal risks or burdens. The theme captures how securitizing narratives persist alongside victim-focused coverage. It was applied to instances in which the migrants were framed as criminals or other general threat-based characterizations, as well as scenarios in which the public opinion has been taken into account regarding the migration crisis that hit Bulgaria in the first months of 2022.

This type of framing reflects the logic of securitization theory, in which political and social actors construct certain issues, such as migration, as existential threats that demand extraordinary measures (Weaver, 1995; Taureck, 2006). In the media context, this often translates into associating migrants with disorder, economic strain, or crime. A quote from one of the selected BTV articles illustrates this discursive shift: “One in four Bulgarians sees Ukrainian refugees as a threat.” (BTV Novinite, 2022b). Such language can construct fear and present migrants not only as a challenge to integration but as active threats to the general public. This further supports Balzacq’s (2011) assertion that discourse drives securitization and relies on the audience’s acceptance of a constructed threat.

The notable distribution of this narrative across the articles from BTV, and less so in independent media sources, suggests that mainstream media and widely viewed channels may amplify securitized framings more intensely than independent outlets, possibly due to political influence or the general desire to appeal to dominant public sentiment (Indzhov, 2024). However, the presence of such a theme in all media types selected for this project indicates that these portrayals are not isolated to one ideological or editorial stance.

The view of Huysmans (2006) on “politics of insecurity” helps understand these patterns as instances in which media representation contributes to constructing migration not only as a humanitarian concern, but also as a risk to order, identity, and stability. These coexisting portrayals suggest that securitization is not a singular or exclusive narrative, but a part of a broader discursive field where threat-based and empathetic framings interact and compete. However, considering the media coverage of previous migration crises in Bulgaria, the representation of Ukrainians has revolved around their establishment as valuable members of society (Baltov, 2022). Based on the analysis of the selected sources, a relatively low number of the chosen articles revolved around the creation and reinforcement of a securitizing narrative, which indicates that the media landscape in general was more focused on creating a more favorable and acceptable profile for the Ukrainian migrants who were fleeing the War in 2022.

Ultimately, this theme illustrates how Bulgarian media can shift between narratives of victimization and narratives of danger, often occurring within the same outlets. This offers a dynamic landscape in which securitization operates as both a dominant and contested process.

4.3 Theme 3 - Positive Framing of Migrants in Bulgaria

Contrary to narratives that portray refugees as vulnerable or a threat, the following theme highlights a strand of media representation in Bulgaria that emphasizes the agency, contribution, and successful integration of Ukrainian migrants. It includes instances in which migrants were portrayed positively, focusing on their general goodness and successful integration attempts.

The essence of this theme aligns with the literature on media’s capacity to construct competing discourses, suggesting that humanitarian narratives are not homogenous (Baltov, 2022). Huysmans (2006) discusses in their work that securitization can coexist with other, more inclusive portrayals, depending on shifting political and social contexts. This specific

representation of Ukrainian refugees in a more favorable light, especially within mainstream media outlets like BTV and NOVA, dictates that securitization is not the only available narrative. The instances in which migrants are positioned as assets to society, engaging in jobs, enrolling in schools, or contributing through voluntary work challenge the dominant threat-based framing that is often associated with migration in Europe (Innes, 2024).

A relevant example for such a media narrative would be the following: “Anya arrived in the country with her daughter ten days ago and already started looking for a job. Tomorrow she has been invited for a job interview at the company, where she will soon be appointed.” (NOVA.bg, 2022a). This quote presents a proactive portrayal of migrants, emphasizing independence and determination, which are qualities that contradict the usual narratives of dependency or passivity often associated with securitization.

It is significant to note that this theme is recurrent in all the selected media outlets, including BTV and NOVA, which are often perceived as more mainstream and sometimes politically influenced (Indzhov, 2024). This even distribution suggests that positive migrant representation was not isolated to the independent sector but managed to find its way into media outlets with a wider reach and potentially different editorial constraints. Furthermore, it may also reflect broader public attitudes of solidarity with Ukrainian migrants, shaped by historical, cultural, or geopolitical proximity, which likely influenced the intensity of securitization narratives found in other cases of migration crises in the country (Innes, 2024; Baltov, 2022).

Essentially, this theme indicates that Bulgarian media narratives were not one-dimensional. Alongside victimization and securitization framings, there existed a parallel discourse that depicted Ukrainian migrants as productive, well-integrated, and socially valuable. These findings demonstrate that media narratives are contested, dynamic, and usually shaped by the interplay of editorial priorities, public sentiment, and the geopolitical profile of the migrant group in question. Furthermore, it highlights that Bulgarian media allowed space for counter-securitization narratives to occur, showing migrants not as threats or burdens, but as active and valuable members of society.

4.4 Theme 4: Effective Governance and Crisis Approach

The next predominant theme that occurred across the selected media outlets was focused on the portrayal of the successful and effective government crisis response that followed the migration crisis, both in its early stages and its progress over the years. It was applied in

instances in which financial support was offered by the ruling government, or when new policy decisions were made for the better integration or education of Ukrainian refugees in the country. The high frequency of occurrence of this theme across all outlets, especially BTV, signals its prominence in shaping public narratives around Bulgaria's handling of the refugee crisis.

This theme aligns with the insights of Neal (2009) and Huysmans (2006), who argue that migration governance is shaped not only by securitizing moves but also by performances of institutional capacity and administrative order. While securitization frames often depict migrants as destabilizing, effective governance narratives can reassert the state's ability to manage these pressures, thus reinforcing its legitimacy and control. In the case of Bulgaria, both during the first stages and the first years of the crisis response, the state was facing political instability, and the narrative of effective governance served as a cover that aimed to portray the action taken by the government as concrete and effective (Kaleynska, 2023).

"The Government approved 297,674 leva to provide free transportation to schools for Ukrainian children under temporary protection."(NOVA.bg, 2024) could serve as a strong example of a media narrative that falls within the characteristics of effective governance. Such coverage can serve as a shift of focus from migrant behavior to state efficacy. Rather than reporting migration as a threat or burden, these stories highlight proactive governance as evidence of institutional success. Furthermore, the concentration of this theme in mainstream media may also suggest editorial alignment with state narratives or efforts to reassure public audiences despite the political instability. However, the significant presence of this theme in independent media suggests that positive assessments of state action transcend partisan boundaries, particularly in the early stages of the crisis.

This theme also links closely with Hampson et al (1998) and Wæver (1995), whose work underscores how exceptional policy responses emerge when an issue is framed as an existential threat. While securitization legitimizes emergency actions, this theme demonstrates how media reporting can simultaneously reinforce the idea that those actions were effective and necessary. The result is a dual discursive move: justifying extraordinary measures, while also affirming the state's competence and moral responsibility.

In its essence, this theme reflects a broader process of political legitimation. The Bulgarian government is shown as not only reacting to a crisis, but also actively managing it with structure, funding, and strong coordination. These findings suggest that alongside securitized discourses, Bulgarian media presented a stabilizing counter-narrative rooted in governance, order, and state responsiveness.

4.5 Theme 5 - Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis

Despite moments of effective institutional response, a parallel and often a more dominant narrative in Bulgarian media focused on the failures, inconsistencies, and shortcomings of the government managing the Ukrainian migration crisis. This theme was applied in instances where poor judgment and failing crisis response were addressed in media reporting of the events of the migration crisis in the country, whilst the unstable government structures were playing a central role (Kaleynska, 2023). Furthermore, the occurrences of this pattern in the media discourse are relatively high, indicating the significant public and journalistic concern over how the state mechanisms handled the crisis.

This theme directly contrasts with “Effective governance and crisis approach”, discussed in the previous section, primarily by focusing on contradicting policies, changes in state strategy, political instability, and funding gaps. This type of reporting directly aligns with Huysmans’ (2006) notion of the “political insecurity”, where governance becomes less about solving social issues and more about reacting to perceived crises through fragmented and reactionary policy-making.

A quote that represents the instability and lack of coherent planning should be: “From sound, transparent, expert decisions, to a complete lack of strategy and long-term vision. From a warm welcome to eviction and lack of food. From promises of integration to closed doors.” (Fileva, 2023). This quote provides a clear example of the swing between initial solidarity and later abandonment, reflecting the broader instability in the government and the crisis response. Furthermore, the theme intersects with ideas from Innes (2024) and Neal (2009), who argue that securitization and crisis response often operate in tension with democratic accountability and transparency. In the Bulgarian case, media reports suggest that the state’s inconsistent behavior and unclear communication undermined public confidence and hindered vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the high occurrence of this theme in BTV, which is typically seen as a more institutionally aligned media outlet, demonstrates that the critique of governance failures transcended editorial or political alignment. It became a mainstream narrative signaling a broad public awareness of the structural and political limitations of Bulgaria’s refugee response.

This theme reinforces the importance of media in holding institutions accountable during crisis periods and underlines the fragmented nature of Bulgaria's migration governance, as reflected across media types and narratives.

4.6 Findings Synthesis

The analysis of the five key themes reveals a highly dynamic and often fragmented media landscape in Bulgaria. As can be seen in Figure 1, taken together, the themes demonstrate that representations of Ukrainian migration were far from monolithic, varying not only across narrative types but also across media outlets.

			 BTV  3  242	 Independent Media  3  197	 NOVA  2  102	Totals
	Effective Governance and Crisis Approach	7  200	97	65	38	200
	Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis	7  235	115	84	36	235
	Positive Framing of Migrants in Bulgaria	3  101	36	36	29	101
	Securitization of Migrants	4  164	89	55	20	164
	Victimization of Migrants	3  115	62	35	18	115
Totals			399	275	141	815

Figure 1. Theme - Document Occurrence Rate

NOVA displayed the more selective engagement with the themes (Figure 2). It presented notably lower frequencies for humanitarian framings such as Victimization of Migrants, while comparatively amplifying Securitization and institutional success narratives. This suggests a cautious editorial approach, leaning toward representations that align with stability-focused messaging. NOVA's limited coverage of migrant vulnerabilities and its higher proportion of securitized framing may indicate a more commercially oriented or politically conservative editorial stance, particularly in moments of heightened public scrutiny.

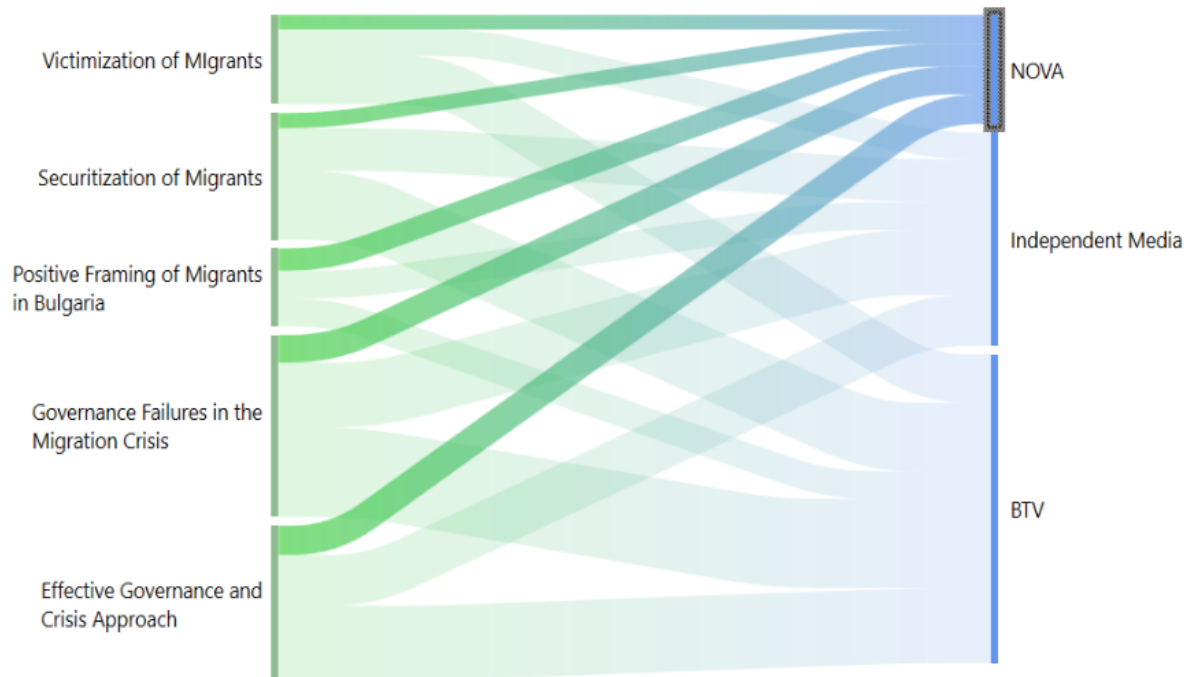


Figure 2. - NOVA News Theme Distribution

Independent media outlets emphasized Governance Failures and Victimization of Migrants more than other themes, highlighting a stronger, crucial tone and humanitarian focus (Figure 3). Their content often questioned the consistency and morality of the state's crisis management while amplifying migrant voices and hardships. Securitizing narratives were the least present in these outlets, aligning with their typically greater editorial autonomy (Indzhov, 2024). Despite fewer resources and smaller reach, independent outlets contributed significantly to pluralizing the media narrative around Ukrainian migration.

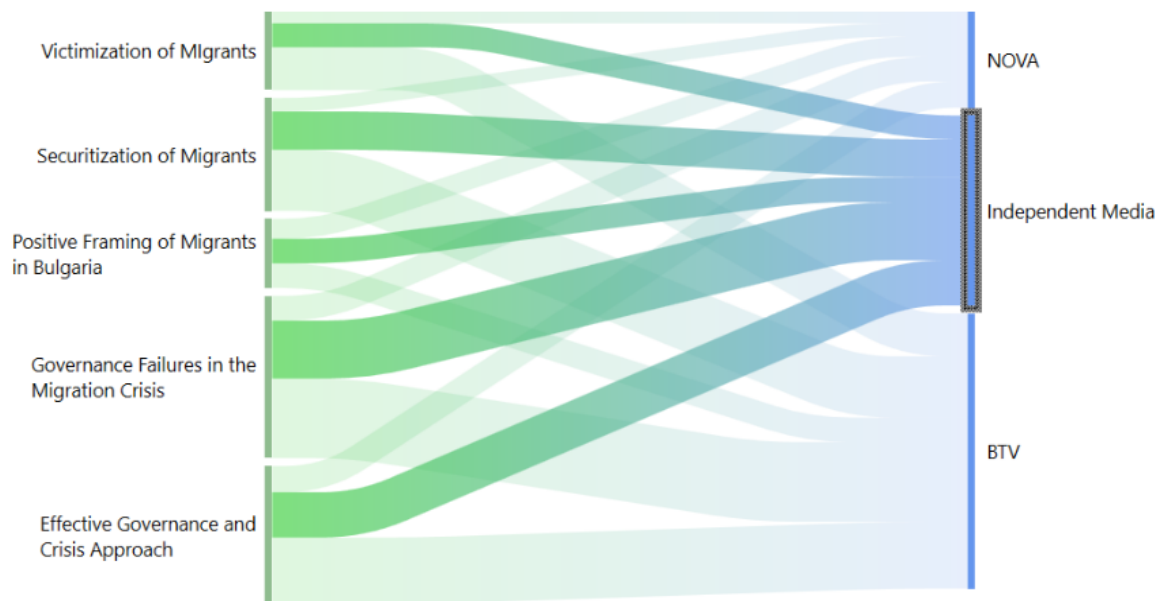


Figure 3. - Independent Media Theme Distribution

In contrast with NOVA, BTV demonstrated the most balanced yet dense thematic coverage overall. As the mainstream outlet with the highest total frequency across all five themes, BTV engaged heavily with both state-centric and migrant centric narratives (Figure 4). It featured strong representations of both Effective Governance and Failures, suggesting a dual strategy of reinforcing state capacity while acknowledging public dissatisfaction. BTV also led in reporting on the Victimization of Migrants and the Positive Framing theme, which points to its role as a mainstream broadcaster that attempted to present both humanitarian and state-aligned perspectives to a wide audience.



Figure 4. - BTV News Theme Distribution

What is particularly revealing is the coexistence of contrasting themes, such as effective crisis response and simultaneous governance failure, within the same outlets (Figure 1). This duality not only echoes Huysmans' (2006) "politics of insecurity" but also supports Balzacq's (2011) notion that discourse is a contested space where multiple narratives compete for legitimacy. In this regard, the same media sources that framed migrants as victims also occasionally presented them as threats or burdens, reflecting broader socio-political tensions and institutional instability in Bulgaria during the observed period.

Together, these findings suggest that while BTV offers a comprehensive and relatively neutral narrative mix, NOVA leans toward securitization and institutional legitimacy, and independent outlets prioritize critical inquiry and migrant-centered storytelling. These divergences reflect broader trends in media-politics relations and the pluralistic yet uneven media environment in Bulgaria.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Reflection

This chapter will focus on summarizing the main findings and providing a structured and comprehensive answer to the main question that guided this research project. Furthermore, it will provide a thorough reflection on the decisions that were made for this research, evaluating their appropriateness about the structure and aim of the research as well as their overall contribution to answering the research question.

5.1 Conclusions

This research project set out to answer the research question: ***"How do Bulgarian media outlets report on migration from Ukraine post-2022, and how do they represent national political discourse?"*** Through a thematic content analysis of 52 media articles from two distinct outlet categories - mainstream media (BTV and NOVA) and independent media - the research uncovered five key themes that offer insight into how migration was constructed through reporting in the Bulgarian media landscape.

The first major finding revealed the prominence of the victimization of migrants. Across all outlets, but particularly in independent media and BTV, Ukrainian refugees were often represented as vulnerable individuals requiring humanitarian support. This reflects on Huysmans' (2006) notion of dual governance - combining compassion with control - and aligns with Balzacq's (2011) argument that securitization operates through discursive framing, even in seemingly apolitical narratives.

The second finding focused on securitizing portrayals, where migrants were occasionally framed as threats or burdens. Despite occurring less frequently, this theme appeared across all outlets, with NOVA showing a slightly higher concentration. This supports the idea that securitization is not exclusive to elite political discourse but also functions in mainstream media, opposing to arguments made by Wæver (1995) and Taureck (2006).

A third and contrasting theme was the positive portrayal of migrants as socially valuable individuals contributing to Bulgarian society. This was notably visible in stories of Ukrainians integrating through work and education. These portrayals challenged dominant securitization narratives and reinforced the fluidity of media discourse as argued by Baltov (2022) and Innes (2024), who highlight that migration can also be constructed through inclusionary or resilience-based frames.

Two further themes addressed the governance dimension. One of them focused on effective crisis management, portraying the Bulgarian government as organized and responsive, especially in the early months of the crisis. The other revealed governance failures, pointing to bureaucratic inconsistency, funding gaps, and political instability. These findings correspond to Neal's (2009) insight into EU-level securitization filtering into national policy discourse, as well as Huysmans' (2006) critique of political insecurity and fragmented state response.

Taken together, these themes indicate that Bulgarian media did not offer a monolithic or unidimensional portrayal of Ukrainian migration. Rather, a plurality of narratives coexisted, shaped by outlet type, political alignment, and public sentiment. This research project contributes to the growing body of research on media, migration, and securitization by offering a country-specific perspective rarely addressed in European migration scholarship, particularly in the context of Bulgaria.

5.2 Reflection

This research project offers both theoretical and empirical contributions to the fields of media, migration, and security studies. At the socio-political level, it highlights how Bulgarian media shape discourse during humanitarian crises, focusing on the complex interplay between narratives of victimhood, securitization, and governance. While the Ukrainian refugee situation initially prompted expressions of solidarity, the media's varied representations reveal deeper tensions in how migration is framed in societies facing political uncertainty and institutional fragmentation, and turmoil. This has implications for both public

perception and policy, especially in EU member states that deal with fluctuating migration flows and polarized public opinion.

From an academic standpoint, the research project reinforces and nuances the assumptions of securitization theory. It illustrates that media actors - not just state officials - actively participate in the construction of migration as either a threat or a humanitarian concern, reflecting the discursive dimensions emphasized by Balzacq (2011) and Taureck (2006). Moreover, the presence of competing narratives across different outlets adds complexity to traditional understandings of securitization as a top-down process, pointing instead to a dynamic, media-driven negotiation of meaning.

Methodologically, the project's strength lies in its comprehensive thematic content analysis, which allowed for the identification of nuanced patterns across multiple outlet types. The inclusion of both public and independent sources helped uncover contrasts that would have remained hidden in a more limited sample. The use of inductive coding and multiple rounds of refinement enhanced the credibility and transparency of the analysis. Additionally, the researcher's language fluency and overall familiarity with the Bulgarian context benefited the project's interpretative depth and dependability.

However, this research project is not without limitations. While the article sample was sufficiently broad to identify key themes, its focus only two mainstream media outlets and a combination of independent sources limited the scope of representation. The reliance on textual data and exclusion of video reports constrained the project's ability to assess visual framing or the emotional tone conveyed through broadcast media. Furthermore, while the thematic analysis approach allowed for analytical flexibility, it did not account for the opportunity of reviewing another type of discourse, thus presenting a fraction of the existing narrative on Ukrainian migration.

Future research could expand this project by including a widespread public survey that can try to assess the impact such narratives have on the general public and how they affect their perception about migration and refugees. Comparative studies between Eastern and Western European countries could also enrich our understanding of how regional histories and political structures influence the media's role in migration discourse. Finally, incorporating more visual analysis as well as introducing social media into future analysis would provide a more holistic view of how migrants are represented across platforms.

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Appendix A - Codebook

Code name	Code Definition	Code Group	Application	Example
Tension and Resource Pressure Narrative	Media reporting, emphasizing societal, economic, or institutional tensions arising from the presence and integration of Ukrainian migrants, portraying migration as a strain or disability	<i>Securitization of Migrants</i>	Applied in instances where migrants applied tension on institutions or other actors responsible for their well-being as refugees.	“They demanded their relocation to state facilities to be expedited and to be taken out of the camp as early as today!” (BTV Novinite, 2022d)
Difficulties in Integration	Media reporting on the obstacles that Ukrainian migrants face in the process of integration into Bulgarian society, particularly regarding employment, housing, and support structures.	<i>Victimization of Migrants</i>	Applied in instances where migrants are depicted as individuals struggling with adjusting to a new environment due to failures in the integration process.	“According to him, refugees are experiencing insecurity due to the bad news they receive from their relatives, the living conditions, the difficulties in finding a general practitioner, the lack of job opportunities for everyone, and the need for kindergartens and schools for everyone.” (Nikolova, 2024)
Migrants as Victims	Media reporting focused on describing migrants as vulnerable individuals in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, focusing on the suffering and hardships they experience.	<i>Victimization of Migrants</i>	Applied in instances where the everyday struggles of being a migrant are portrayed through emphasis on health and integration issues.	“” The sick, the disabled, the injured have to travel to Elhovo at their own expense, where there are no medical services, no clarity on who will feed them, only for them to wait for a month to be allocated to another facility,” the lawyer commented.” (Dimitrova & Free Europe, 2022)

Vandalism and Crime Against Migrants	Media reporting on acts of violence, harassment, or criminal violence committed against Ukrainian migrants.	<i>Victimization of Migrants</i>	Applied in instances that show the hostility and risks faced by refugee communities in Bulgaria.	Images published on other social networks also show that the license plates of the cars have been covered with red spray paint, the headlights have been damaged, and slogans like “Putin” and “Out of BG!” have been written on the doors and windows of the vehicles. The cars also have the latter “Z” painted on them - the letter which Russia turned into a symbol of the war it is waging in Ukraine.” (Spasov, 2023)
Positive Portrayals of Migrants	Media reporting on migrants’ positive moral qualities, social contributions, resilience, or exceptional achievements.	<i>Positive Framing of Migrants in Bulgaria</i>	Applied in instances that show migrants as valuable members of society.	Her child is an athlete and represents Bulgaria in sports competitions. They live in a rented apartment and have completed a course in the Bulgarian language. She also finished a photography course here, which she paid for herself. Every Wednesday, she gives free haircuts to people in need because she is a hairdresser. Her car has been parked in front of the building since she arrived, but she doesn’t drive it...” (Spasov, 2023)

Providing Voluntary Help	Media reporting on migrants and citizens providing voluntary help to aid the Ukrainian refugees in establishing themselves in a new environment.	<i>Positive Framing of Migrants in Bulgaria</i>	Applied in instances where the media described actions taken by migrants or citizens that directly benefited the refugees in need, such as providing shelter, food, or financial support.	“Natalia Elis - a Ukrainian volunteer living in Plovdiv who helps refugees across the country - told “Free Europe” firsthand what she encountered in Elhovo. She had to go there three times: first time to distribute blankets and bedding, the second for stoves and food, and the third for food and water.” (Dimitrova & Free Europe, 2022)
Migrant Engagement and Successful Integration	Media reporting on migrants’ active participation and successful integration into Bulgarian society.	<i>Positive Framing of Migrants in Bulgaria</i>	Applied in instances where the resilience, adaptability, and positive contribution of migrants are highlighted.	“It wasn’t hard to find a job. I work 12-hour shifts at the crisis center now. I receive, sort, and pack the aid that is being sent from here to Ukraine. I also provide psychological support to my fellow countrymen who have fled the war.” (NOVA.bg, 2022b)
Migration in Numbers	Media reporting on the number of migrants that entered or stayed in the country, and how those numbers fluctuated during the crisis.	<i>Securitization of Migration</i>	Applied in instances where the media presented the number of migrants entering the country in a way that put stress and created tensions for the government and the general public.	“So far, over 81,000 Ukrainians have entered the country. Of those, around 38,000 Ukrainian citizens have remained within the country.” (BTV Novinite, 2022a)

Migrants as a Threat	Media reporting on migrants as sources of threat or insecurity, either through direct criminal acts or through reporting on public fear.	<i>Securitization of Migration</i>	Applied in instances where criminal actions associated with Ukrainian migrants have been reported.	“AFTER A CHASE: A Ukrainian man was caught transporting 11 illegal migrants.” (NOVA.bg, 2023c)
Migrants as Bad People	Media reporting on migrants as morally flawed individuals who pose a threat to society.	<i>Securitization of Migration</i>	Applied in instances where actions such as deceit or fraud have been associated with Ukrainian migrants in Bulgaria.	“The Ukrainian refugees accommodated in hotels along the Black Sea coast have misled the authorities about their intentions.” (BTV Novinite, 2022c)
Government Crisis Approach	Media reporting on the Bulgarian government’s policy responses, crisis management, and handling of Ukrainian migration after 2022.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where the actions of the government regarding the migration crisis have been reported.	“... refugees from Ukraine accommodated in government accommodation schemes in hotels will be supported for another four months, overriding the previous announcement to end the scheme by November 15, 2022.” (Sofia Globe, 2022d)

Political Stability	Media reporting on the effectiveness and stability of political institutions in Bulgaria and the government's coordination efforts in managing the Ukrainian refugee situation.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where the success of the governance approach was highlighted by the media.	“ The approach of Kiril Petkov's government to accommodate the Ukrainians in hotels was a good gesture toward them; the institutions quickly organized to ensure registration at the border checkpoints, a crisis task force was adequately formed, operating in a good format - with representatives from NOGs, meeting weekly, providing information and guidance.” (Fileva, 2023)
Positive (Foreign) Recognition	Media reporting on positive responses from foreign and local actors toward the crisis management of the Ukrainian migration.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where government officials complemented the Bulgarian Approach to the migration crisis.	“Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba expressed thanks to Bulgaria for the support and help given to Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war.” (Sofia Globe, 2022b)
Provided Opportunities for Education	Media reporting on the efforts to provide refugees with access to education, support for online learning, or additional resources such as transportation.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where media presented the adjustments made for migrants in terms of education, aimed at fostering successful integration and education as a whole.	“All children and students who have been granted temporary protection are provided with free education and training in state and municipal kindergartens and schools in Bulgaria, according to the Ministry of Education.” (Nikolova, 2024)

Heroism Rhetoric	Media reporting on public statements made by political officials that focus on establishing state actions aimed at the migration crisis as extraordinary and unique.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where heroic discourse is reported by the media, with the intent to portray the succeeding actions taken by the government, aimed at solving the migration crisis.	“Radev said that Bulgaria has helped thousands of Ukrainian people in the early days of the war, and many of them continue to receive protection and humanitarian aid here.” (NOVA.bg, 2023b)
Providing Financial Support	Media reporting on the allocation of funds or the provision of general health services support for Ukrainian migrants.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where the positive sides of the Bulgarian state’s humanitarian and crisis management strategies have been reflected.	“The ministry said that more than 11 million leva would be paid to 328 legal entities operating in 506 places of accommodation.” (Sofia Globe, 2022c)
Government Assurances	Media reporting on official public statements that commit to providing protection, assistance, or rights for Ukrainian refugees.	<i>Effective Governance and Crisis Approach</i>	Applied in instances where the media described or directly quoted public statements and promises from the government regarding the crisis approach, as a way to reinforce the narrative of reliability and humanitarian responsibility.	“Deputy Prime Minister Kalina Konstantinova, who chairs the operational headquarters set up to deal with the refugee situation, said that the situation in Bulgaria was calm and “under control”.” (Sofia Globe, 2022a)

Lack of Favorable Living Conditions	Media reporting on the poor, unsanitary, or inadequate living conditions faced by Ukrainian migrants.	<i>Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis</i>	Applied in instances where the media highlighted the failure of the government to provide the necessary living conditions and meet the basic needs of the refugees who fled to the country.	“We faced situations in the state-provided facilities where there was no hot water, and we were fed with delivered food that was insufficient. The children wouldn’t eat that food, so many mothers had to look for money to buy food for their kids. We had to turn to various charity organizations that helped us with groceries and clothes.” (NOVA.bg, 2022b)
Lack of Governmental Funding	Media reporting on delays, suspension, or complete absence of governmental financial support for the Ukrainian migrants.	<i>Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis</i>	Applied in instances where the media depicted the failure of the government to provide stable funding for private actors that provided accommodation to migrants in state-organized programs, or when the government failed to meet the basic financial support needs of the migrants themselves.	“At the start of the season, private hotel owners in Sunny Beach staged a protest. The reason is that for nine months, the Ministry of Tourism hasn’t paid out the funds under the humanitarian program for accommodating Ukrainian refugees.” (BTV Novinite, 2024)
Political Instability	Media reporting on the chaotic, inconsistent, or conflicting nature of the Bulgarian government’s handling of the refugee crisis.	<i>Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis</i>	Applied in instances that described the unstable governance in the country, such as the lack of strategic planning and the existing political scandals.	“Caretaker Interior Minister Ivan Demerdzhiev has filed a report against members of the Petkov cabinet for misuse of funds intended for the Ukrainian refugees.” (NOVA.bg, 2023a)

Uncertainty	Media reporting on unclear government decisions, communication breakdowns, or shifting migration policies.	<i>Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis</i>	Applied in instances where the media reported on government actions that created confusion, insecurity, and instability for migrants, service providers, and the Bulgarian public in general.	“There was a problem with large hotels in the major cities, which had said that the amount set aside by the state for financial support did not make accommodating the Ukrainians affordable for them.” (Sofia Globe, 2022a)
Urgency	Media reporting on the pressing needs crisis, or immediate action demands made by migrants, service providers, or upset citizens.	<i>Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis</i>	Applied in instances where the media described demands made by various actors that were caused primarily due to delayed or insufficient government responses to the migration crisis, often focusing on humanitarian risks.	“The problem with food-provision for the Ukrainian refugees accommodated in state facilities and hotels is worsening, while the caretaker government still hasn’t responded in any way.” (Dnevnik.bg, 2022)
Contrast	Media using opposing narratives to show the contrast of the different approaches of the different working governments during the time of the crisis.	<i>Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis</i>	Applied in instances where the media used contrast to emphasize the errors made by the government during the migration crisis.	“From good, transparent, expert-driven decisions to a lack of strategy and long-term vision. From a warm welcome to expulsion and a lack of food. From promises of integration to closed doors. From hotels with five-course meals to centers with caravans and barbed wire.” (Fileva, 2023)

Appendix B - Tables and Graphs

			BTV 3 242	Independent Media 3 197	NOVA 2 102	Totals
Effective Governance and Crisis Approach	7	200	97	65	38	200
Governance Failures in the Migration Crisis	7	235	115	84	36	235
Positive Framing of Migrants in Bulgaria	3	101	36	36	29	101
Securitization of Migrants	4	164	89	55	20	164
Victimization of Migrants	3	115	62	35	18	115
Totals			399	275	141	815

Figure 1. Theme - Document Occurrence Rate

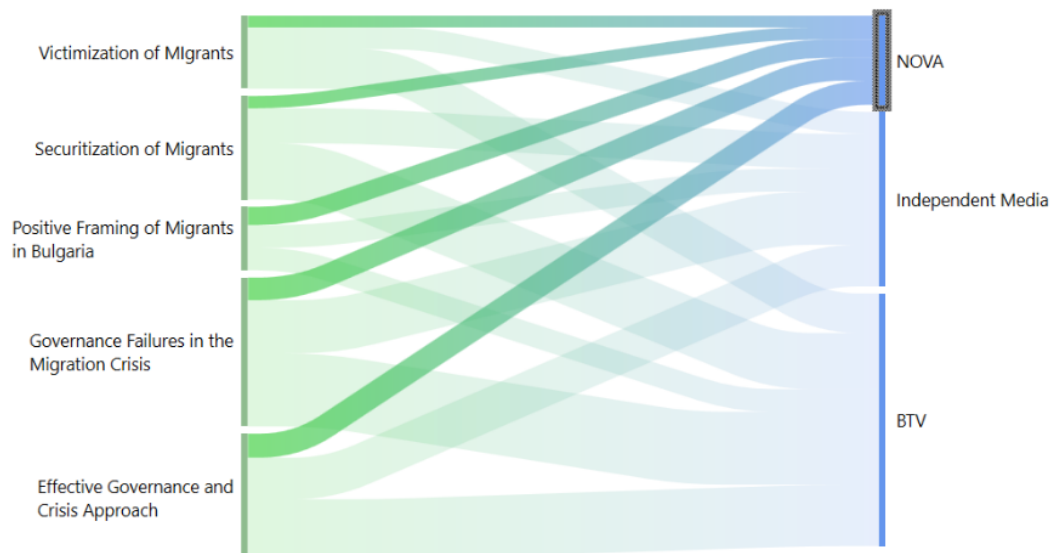


Figure 2. - NOVA News Theme Distribution

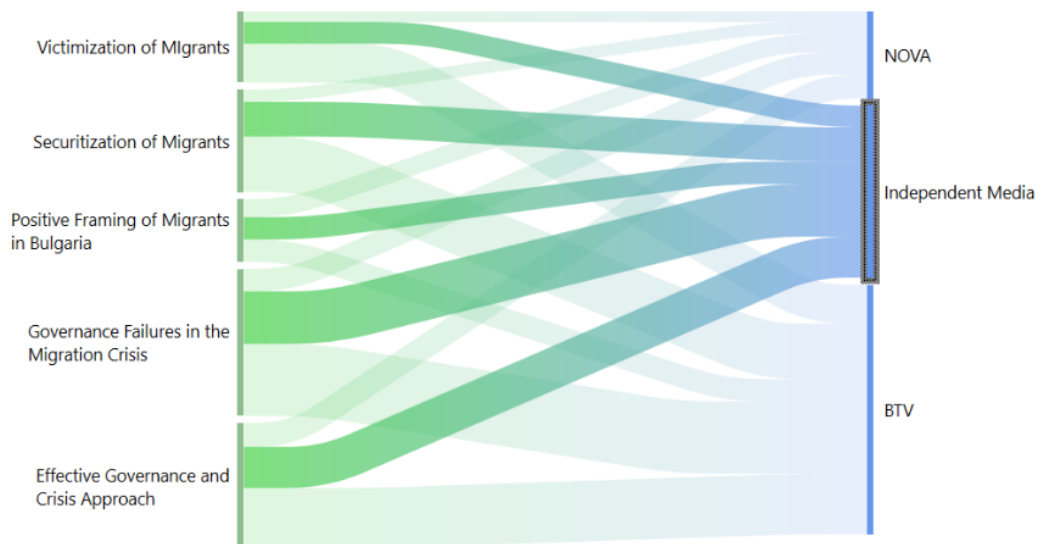


Figure 3. - Independent Media Theme Distribution

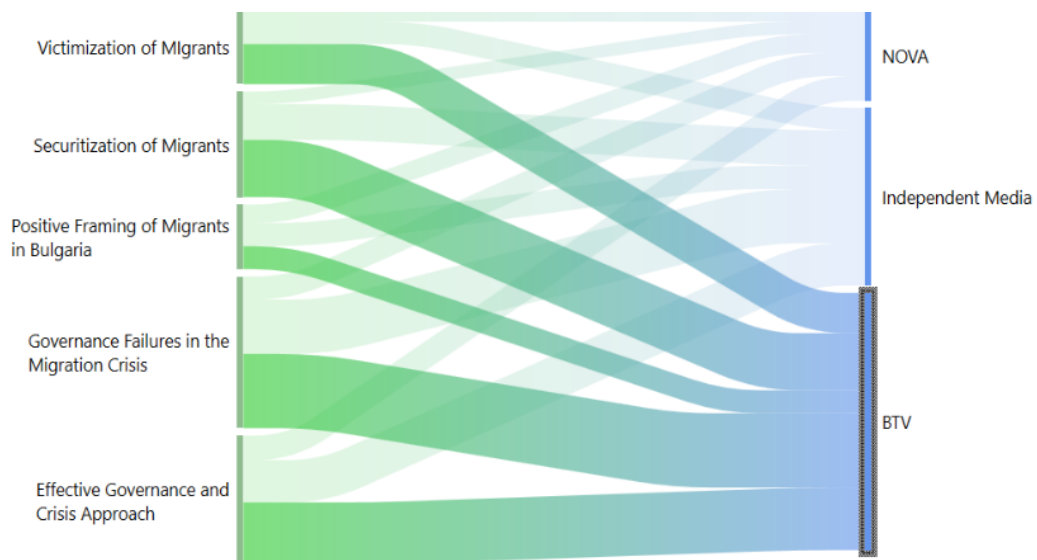


Figure 4. - BTV News Theme Distribution