

**BAHAR AYAZ**

Gazi University, Turkey

## **SYRIAN CRISIS: TURKEY, LEBANON AND JORDAN NEWS AGENCY'S PERSPECTIVES**

### **Abstract:**

Uprisings, which started in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, demanding freedom and democracy against dictatorships began to affect Syria in March 2011. Soon after, this uprisings created a crisis which media have shown a lot of interest. There have been many studies examining the attitudes of European and American media. The aim of this study is to show and compare Syria's neighbours views according to this crisis. In this study, Turkey's, Lebanon's and Jordan's news agencies news about Syria are analysed. Anadolu Agency (Turkey), the Lebanese National News Agency NNA (Lebanon) and Jordan News Agency PETRA (Jordan) are examined within the framework of this study. This news agencies have different ownership structures. Anadolu Agency is autonomous, Jordanian News Agency is independent and the Lebanese National News Agency has a state-owned structure. This different ownership structures are also analysed and compared. The three neighbours of Syria will be compared with a method of content analysis. The outstanding topics, prominent actors, neglected issues are examined. The fundamental differences are revealed. At the end of the study, it was clear that all agencies were reporting news correspondingly to their foreign policies, regardless of ownership structures. While Jordan news agency neglected the Syrian crises because of a fear of similar situation in the country, Lebanon news agency reflected states complex structure. On the other hand, Turkey's news agency represented Turkish foreign policy which shows similar attitudes with USA.

### **Keywords:**

Syrian Conflict, Uprisings, Content Analysis, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan

**JEL Classification:** F50, F29, Y80

## 1. Introduction

In this study, Turkey's, Lebanon's and Jordan's news agencies news about Syria are analysed with content analysis. As a scientific approach; content analysis examines verbal, written and other materials contained in the message. Systematic classifications is also a part of this method.

News on websites of news agencies are examined and differences are revealed. Anadolu Agency (Turkey), the Lebanese National News Agency NNA (Lebanon), Jordan News Agency PETRA (Jordan) Agency are examined within the framework of this study.

This news agencies have different ownership structures. Anadolu Agency is autonomous, Jordan News Agency is independent and the Lebanese National News Agency has a state-owned structure. Those different ownership structures and their reflections on news are also discussed. In order to compare three different ownership structures, other neighbors of Syria and other states have been excluded from this study.

The main aims of this study is, to reveal differences between News Agencies and to examine the reasons for this result. Western media sources offers continuous information about Syria. How media outside of West, discusses the Syrian crises is a neglected issue. Therefore, examining the news of three states neighboring Syria is important.

In this study, news from the websites of Anadolu Agency (AA), the Lebanese National News Agency (NNA) and Jordan News Agency (PETRA) are examined within the period of 25 March 2013 - 31 March 2013.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study is discussed within the framework of Herman and Chomsky's approach; "Propaganda Model". Generally when a news is biased or inadequate, its considered as reporters own attitude. However, recent studies focused on economic, political and social causes and start looking at government regulations and the control of the media content (Muratoğlu, 2011: 9).

According to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, media plays an important role in the manufacturing of consent, and media content is driven by the ruling class (Muratoğlu, 2011: 10). An autonomous structure Anadolu Agency (AA), an independent structure Jordan News Agency (PETRA), and the state owned Lebanese National News Agency (NNA), have different ownership structures, but all offer a ruling class driven content. As seen in Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, media implements a systematic propoganda with the vaccination of certain values and beliefs.

Media that chooses what to publish or not, is not different from other for-profit institutions. It also has a product to sell. Hackett and other researchers claims that media is the most important instution to create an environment for consent to maintain the power of the ruling class (Mora, 2008: 12).

According to Herman and Chomsky, media sets the agenda according to the interests of the ruling class, and protects their interests. Media biased to serve political interests

and marginalizes different ideas. In this sense, the media serves to protect intellectual culture, instead of guarding reality (Muratoğlu, 2011: 10).

Media plays an important role in the manufacturing of the consent and its content is directed by the dominant class. Accordingly; Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria's political system is also being shaped by media content. Syrian opposition / rebel can make their voices heard through social media which is not driven by the dominant class, but their representation on traditional media or other opinions representation on media seems to be very little.

### **3. Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and the Syrian Crisis**

Uprisings which demand freedom and democracy against dictatorship in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya began to affect Syria in March 2011 (Yazıcı, 2012: 38). USA which had bad relationship with the Assad government, has called for the withdrawal of the Syrian government (Yazıcı, 2012: 38). While Israel and the USA were supporting the uprisings, as well as Russia and China, also Hezbollah and Hamas stand up against to interference of internal affairs of Syria.

Uprisings that started in Tunisia had also spread to Jordan. Therefore, Jordan is worried of those uprisings transforming to a mass protest movement (Akbaş, 2012: 449). Jordan, which is in a similar situation with Syria, has a touchy situation.

Jordan has a weak parliamentary democracy. King has the authority to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister and the Ministers (Akbaş, 2012: 443). The King's preferences constitute the main axis of the foreign policy (Akbaş, 2012: 442). Foreign aid is the most important component of Jordan's foreign policy and it also sustains economy. Jordan, is getting help from many countries including USA (Akbaş, 2012: 451). USA also provides military aid to Jordan. For these reasons, Jordan follows a similar attitude with USA towards Syria.

Turkey's foreign policy is similar to Jordan concerning Syria. Hatay issue and Syria's support of terrorism in Turkey constituted bad relations, but after the 2000s, two countries relationship has experienced a healing process. But relations worsened again, after March 2011 when uprisings started in Syria and the Assad government has taken in response to these uprisings (Özcan, 2012: 220). Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoglu had expressed that Turkey will be supporting opponents till to 'democratic Syria' (Özcan, 2012: 253).

While Turkey and Jordan choose to follow a similar policy with USA, the situation in Lebanon is more complicated. People with different faiths are living in Lebanon, while Hezbollah openly supports Assad, Sunnis and Christians on the other hand exhibit an opposite opinion (Özdağ, 2012: 74). While Lebanon's Sunnis wants to take advantage from uprisings to end the Hizbullah's activities (Özdağ, 2012: 67), Nusairis react so severe to the Sunnis "the butcher Assad" banners that at the end army handled the situation (Özdağ 2012: 74). To summarize the situation; while Sunnis and Christians, supplying weapons to Syrian rebels, Hezbollah, who has the control of military and intelligence, catches Assad opponents and surrender them to the government.

### **4. PETRA, AA and NN News Agencies**

Jordan News Agency (PETRA) which was established in 1969 under the Ministry of Information, began working as an independent institution in 2004. Of course in a monarch, how much an independent press organ may be independent is a controversial issue. PETRA, which is an active member of Arab News Agencies (FANA), has correspondents in many cities like Cairo, Copenhagen, New York, Bucharest and Beirut. News agency provides English and Arabic news with photographs which are posted on the agency website. In 2004, the website had 7 million monthly visitors (PETRA, access date: 11.04.2013 16:18).

Anadolu Agency was established on April 6, 1920. In 1925 AA had attained an autonomous status (AA, access date: 11.04.2013 16:27) The most concrete indicator of AA's being under the influence of government is governments budget support (Bengi, 2012: 313)

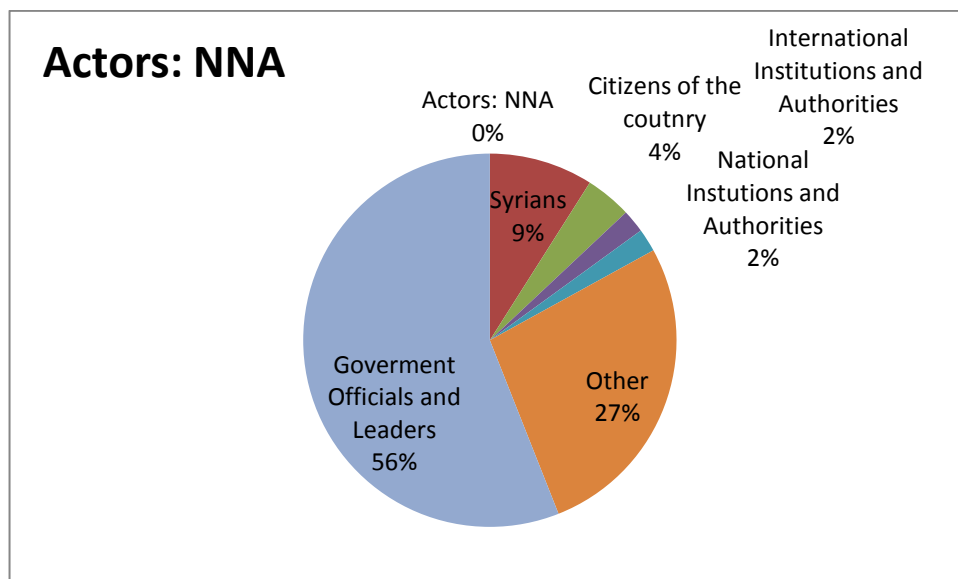
The objectivity of the news agency is questioning because of agencies getting help from state, its employees considered as civil servants and the change of administration in every government reshuffle (Bengi, 2012: 333). AA offices are located in many parts of the world and there is Turkish, Arabic, English, Croatian and Russian news on agency's website.

Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) is a news agency which is linked to the Ministry of Intelligence. There is English, Arabic and French broadcasting via the website. There is news with security, politics, economics, education, culture, sports content and international news are also available.

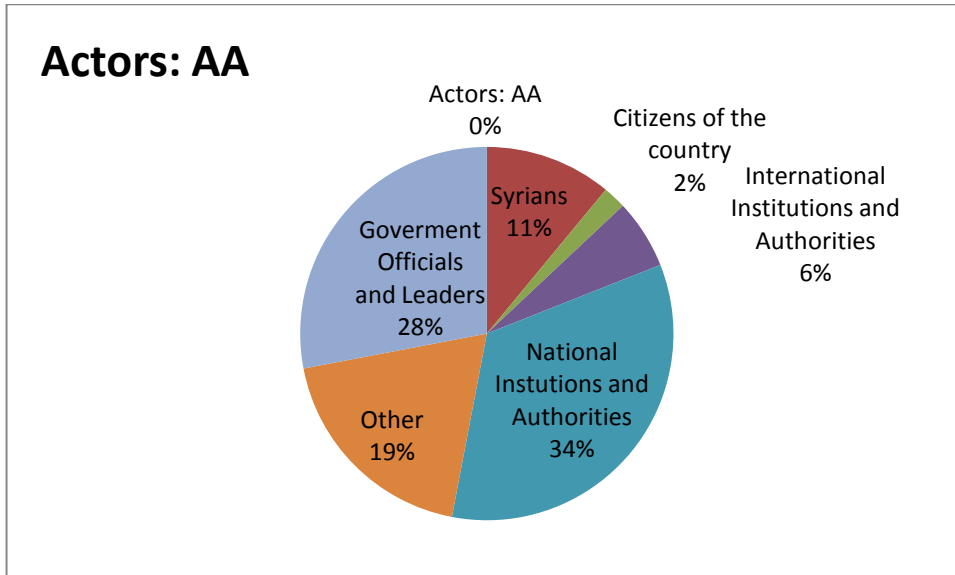
## 5. Findings of the Research

News of three news agencies scanned between 25 March 2013 – 31 March 2013 via the web pages. 112 news were related with Syria. NNA had 45 news, Anadolu Agency had 47 and PETRA had 20 news which was related with Syria.

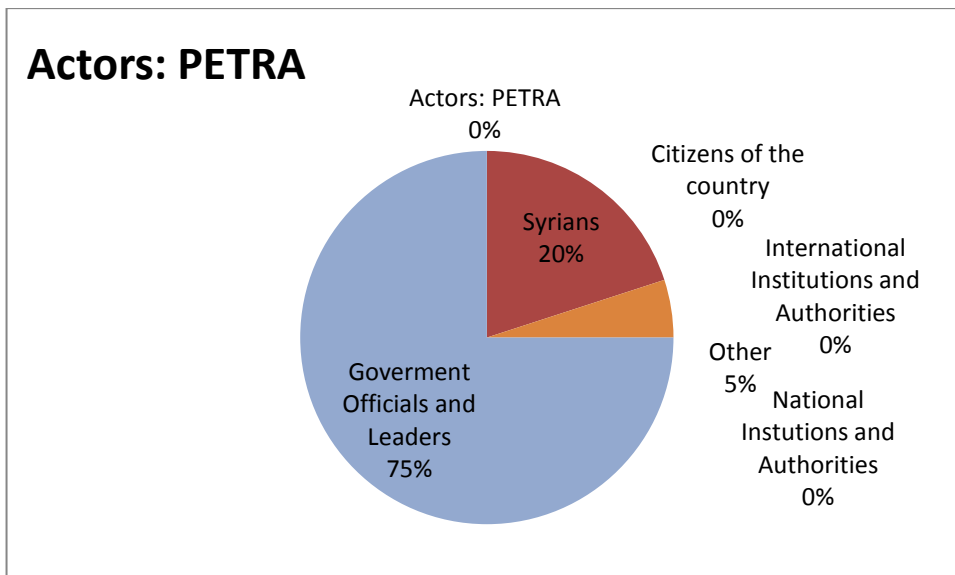
Within the framework of this study, the actors of the news were investigated. In Lebanese News Agencies news the Lebanese government officials / leaders were represented at most (56%). Coverage of news regarding Syrian management, national or international institutions was very little.



The situation is quite different in Anadolu Agencies news. Syria's national institutions emerged as the most important actor of the news (34%) These national institutions are under the control of Syrian rebels. Turkish officials are also important actors. Anadolu Agency has a similarity with NNA, that representation of Syrian management or international institutions was very little.



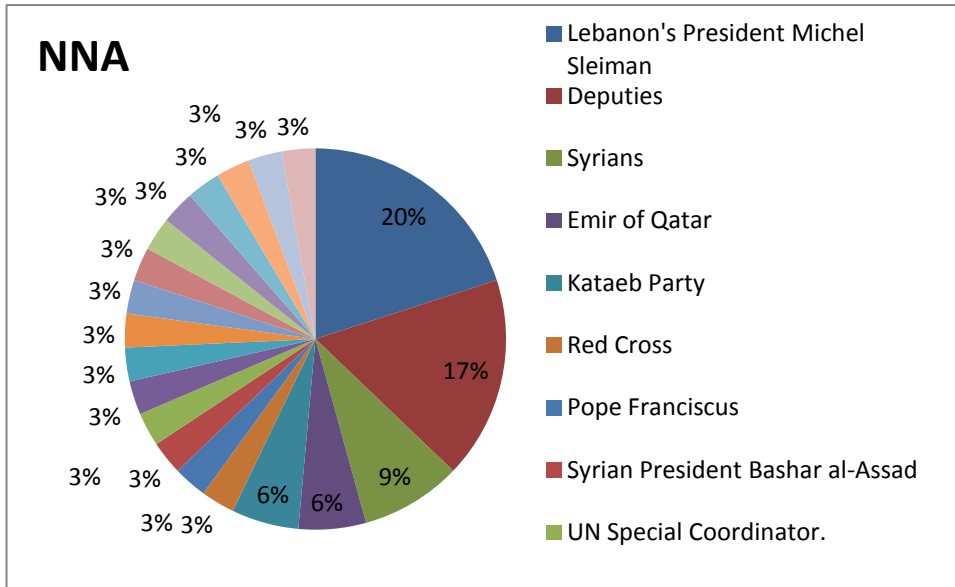
Like Turkey and Lebanon news agencies, PETRA also represent national authorities a lot. But this percentage is even more on PETRA news (75%). Other news actors are the Syrian people. Syrians were represented more in Jordan News Agency, than the other news agencies. This rate was 25% in PETRA, 11% in AA and 9% in NNA.



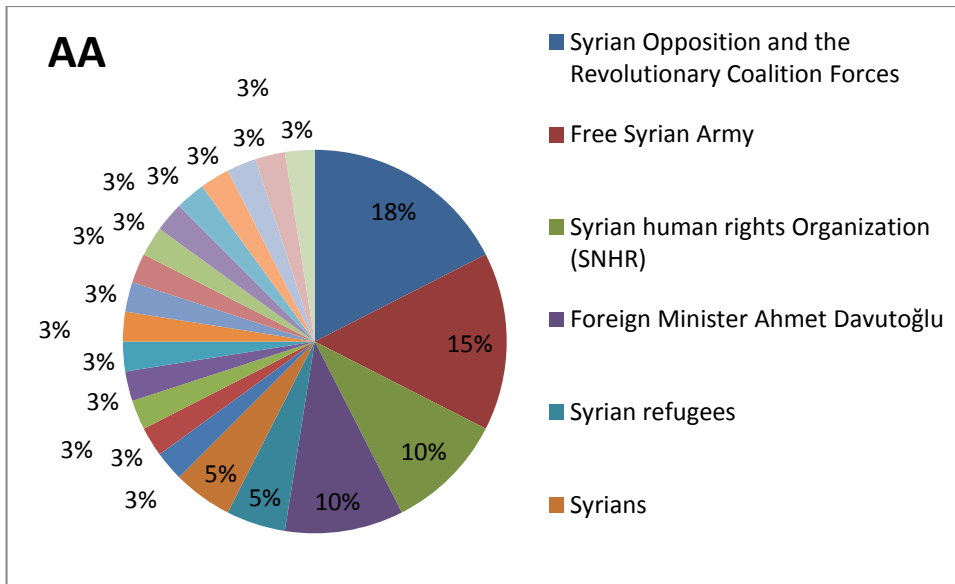
While NNA and PETRA represent their countries officials at most, AA represent Syrian rebels voices at most.

Person or entity which is mostly represented on NNA news are respectively; Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, Deputies, Syrians, the Emir of Qatar, Kataeb Party, Red Cross, Pope Franciscus, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, UN Special Coordinator.

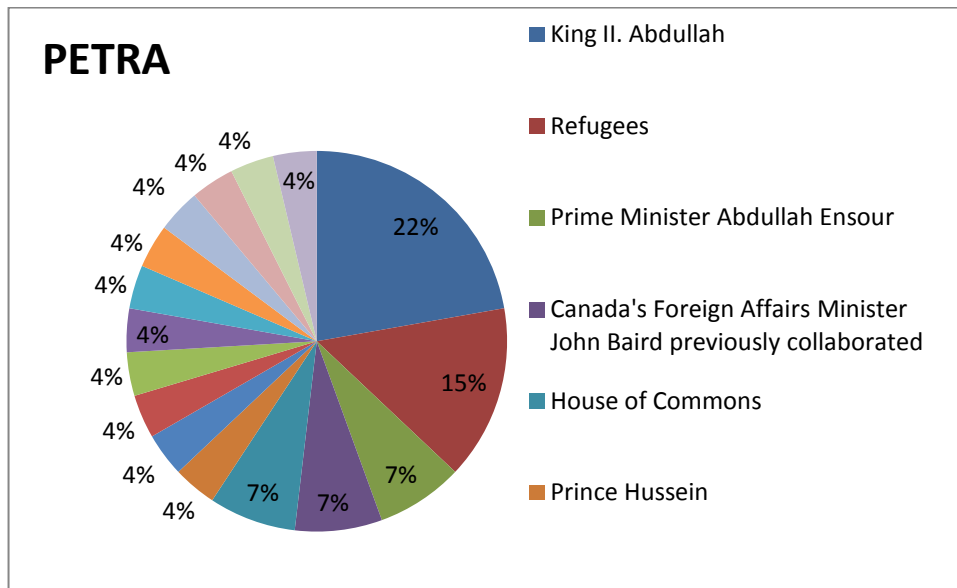
The complex situation of Lebanon is also reflected on news. Both people or institutions like Pope Francis, Red Cross people and the Emir of Qatar and the president of Lebanon are represented. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is only represented in the Lebanese News Agency. This is not surprising. While Jordan and Turkey is criticizing the Assad regime, there is an important group in Lebanon that supports the Assad regime.



Person or entity which is mostly represented on AA news are respectively; Syrian Opposition and Revolutionary Forces Coalition, the Free Syrian Army, Syrian Human Rights Organization, Republic of Turkey, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Syrian refugees, Syrians, President of Turkey Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.



Person or entity which is mostly represented on PETRA news are respectively; Jordan's King II. Abdullah, Refugees, Jordan Government Prime Minister Abdullah Enso, Canada Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird House of Commons, Jordan Prince Hussein, the French Ambassador to Jordan Caroline Dumas, Minister of State SamihMa'ayta and Iraq's State Vice President Khudair Khuzai.

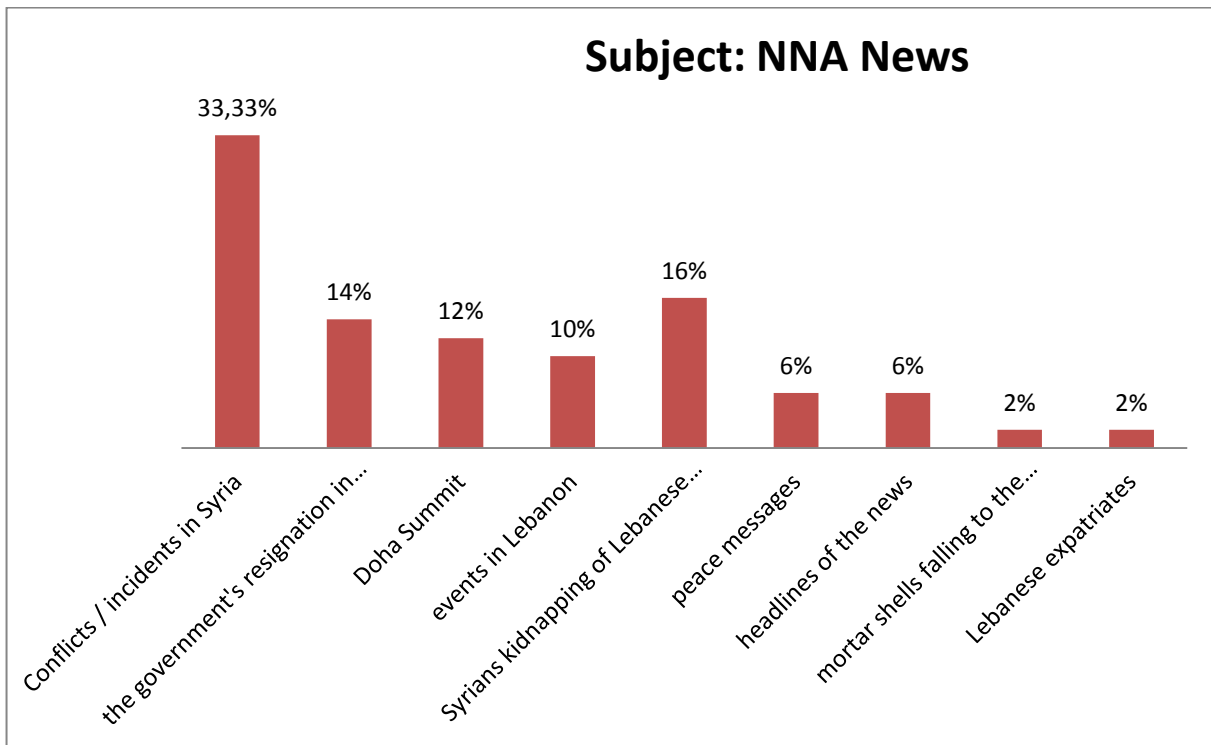


Syrian Opposition and Revolutionary Forces Coalition, the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian Human Rights Organization are only represented in Turkey's news agency. In this respect, the support of Turkey to Syrian rebels is reflected on the news. The pro-USA Jordan's foreign policy is not represented on news. The most important reason for this is, the riots that started in Tunisia had quickly spread to many countries. And one of these countries is Jordan. The opposition groups in Jordan are perceived as a threat to the future of Jordan and increasing uncertainty. Therefore, for internal and external attitudes, these opposition groups activities are taken into account (Akbaş, 2012: 447). Jordan has a fear to become like Syria, as there is also uprisings in the country. This questions the independence of the news agency. King II. Abdullah's representation rate on news is also confirming this situation.

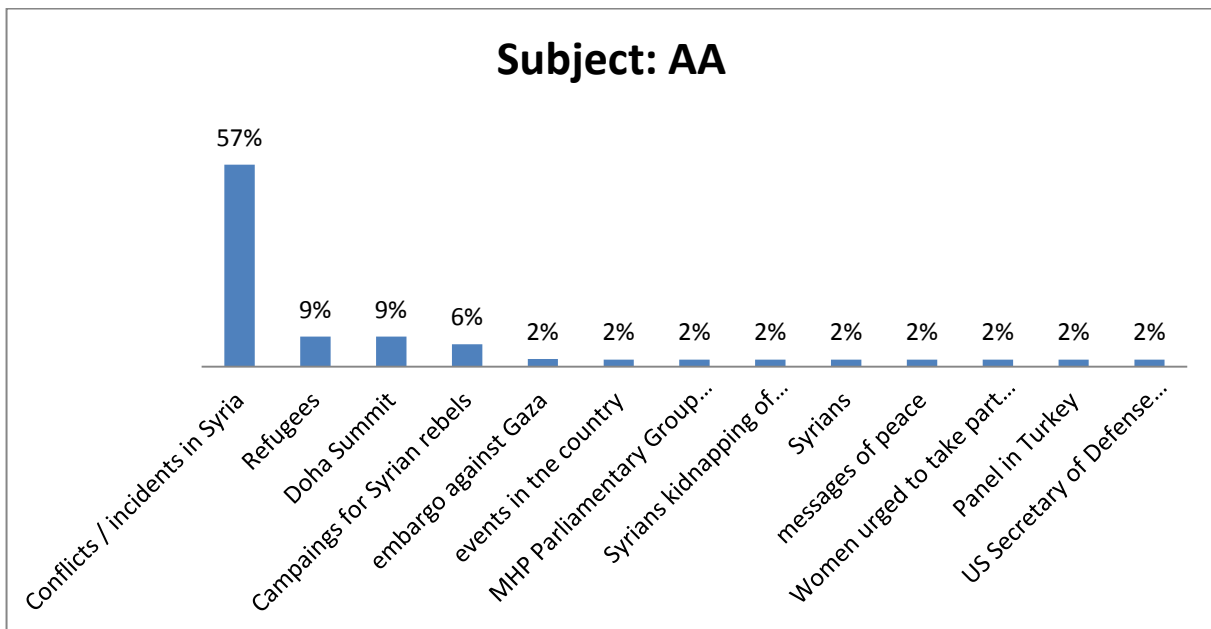
United Nations, USA, France and Canada are represented merely. But China or Russia has no representation at all. In the same week that this study was conducted, the Fifth BRICS (BRICS represent the unity of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Summit took place which issued a declaration on Syria's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty (Fifth BRICS Summit Declaration and Action Plan). This Summit and declarations have been ignored by all of the news agencies.

Within the framework of this study, forefront issues of news were also examined. The most covered issues in Lebanese News Agency are respectively; Conflicts / incidents in Syria, the government's resignation in Lebanon/ new government, the establishment of the Doha Summit, events in Lebanon, Syrians kidnapping of Lebanese pilgrims, peace messages regarding Syria, headlines of the news, Lebanese expatriates, mortar shells falling to the Lebanese border.

The issue of Syria is issued in news such as; the resignation of the government, the Doha Summit. New Lebanese government's relations with Syria and the Syrian issue which become a prominent issue in Doha Summit is covered.

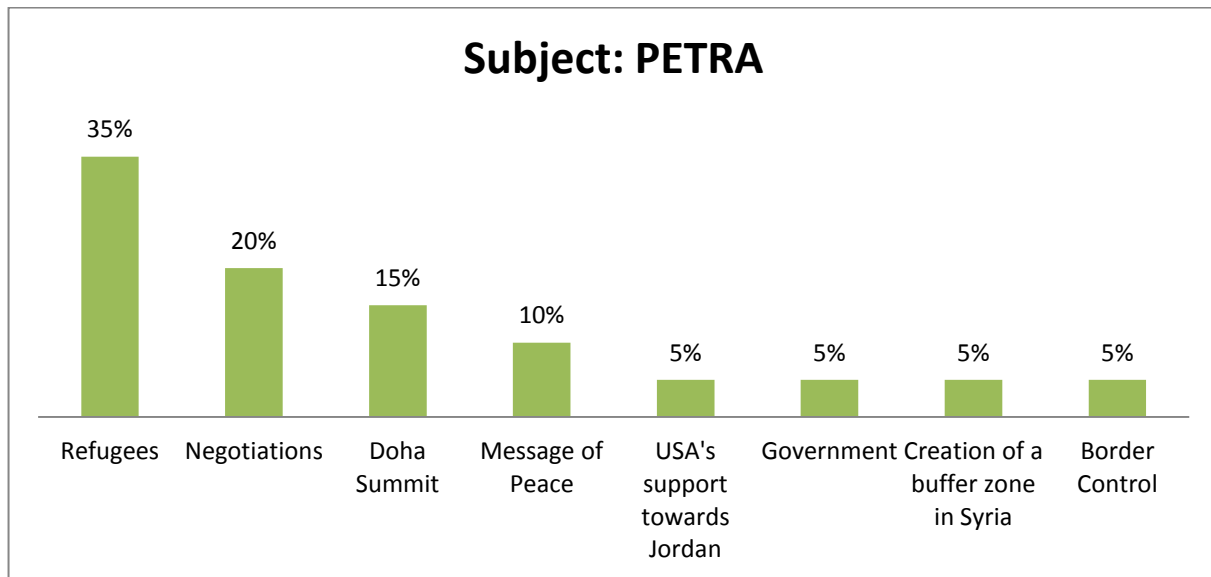


The most covered issues in Anadolu Agency are respectively, the conflict in Syria, Syrians refugees, Doha Summit, campaigns that held for Syrian rebels, embargo against Gaza, MHP group meeting, kidnapped Lebanese pilgrims, the Syrian people, peace messages for Syria, call for women's to take place in religious organizations, panel held in Turkey and U.S. Secretary of Defense to be a fan of Ataturk. Although some news were completely related with the issue of Syria, some were related both with Syria and other issues.



The most covered issues in Jordan News Agency are respectively; Syrian refugees, negotiations, the Doha Summit, peace messages for Syria, USA's supports towards Jordan, the creation of a buffer zone in Syria and its border control.



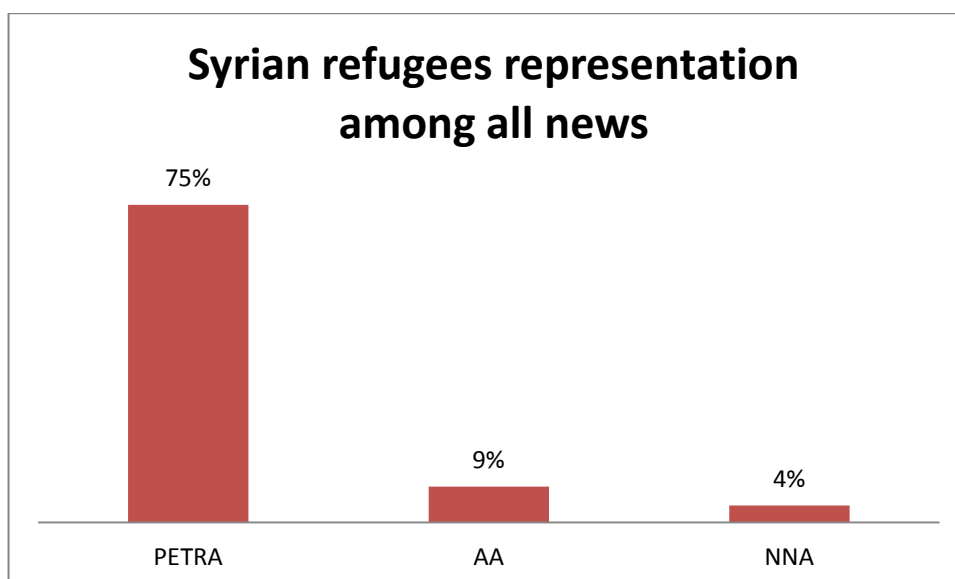


In Lebanese News Agency and Anadolu Agency the most covered issue is the conflict in Syria. And Jordan News Agency covers the Syrian refugees in Jordan mostly. All of the news agencies covers the Doha Summit and the peace messages for Syria. Other news are mostly related to the countries' own agendas.

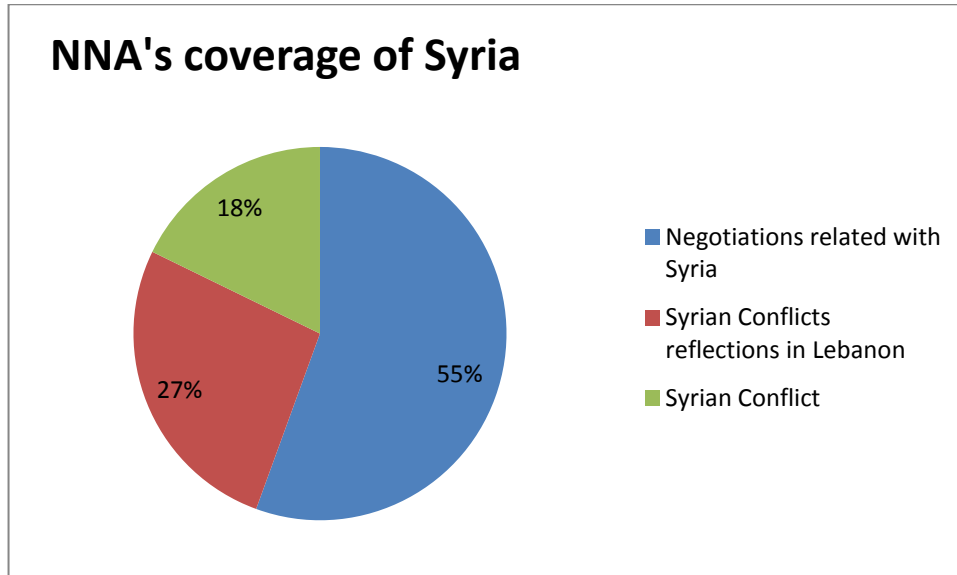
In this study, it is observed that Jordan News Agency did not cover the conflict in Syria at all. One of the most important news sources; Jordan News Agency's neglecting the Syrian conflict reveals that Syrian Conflict is neglected in Jordan's Press.

News Agency of Turkey and Lebanon covers the conflict of Syria, but mostly give information about material and spiritual losses that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his army causes. Both sides of the war is not represented on news.

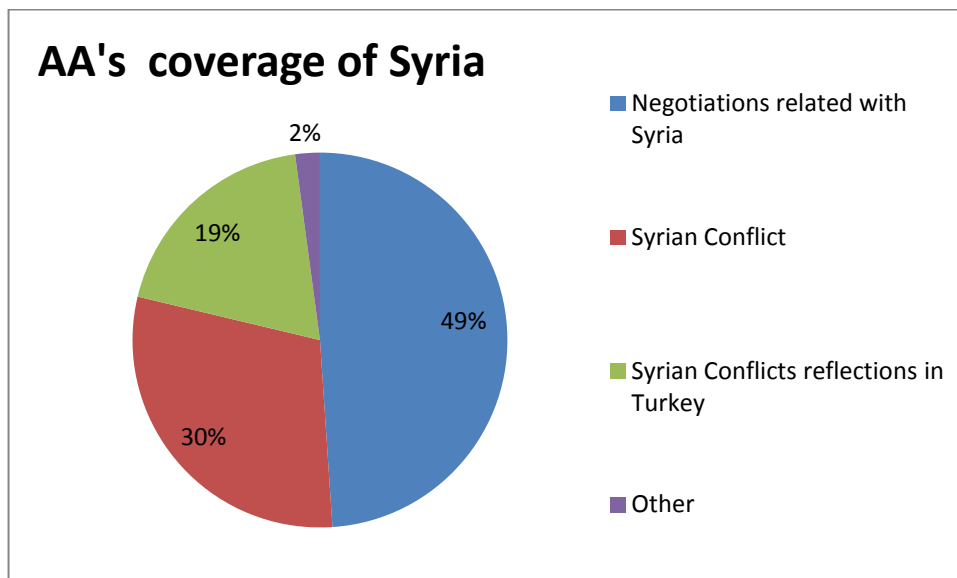
When we look at the representation of Syrian refugees on the news, the Jordan News Agency is noticeably in front. Syrian refugees representation among all news regarding Syria is 75% in Jordan News Agency, 9% in Anadolu Agency and 4% in Lebanese News Agency.



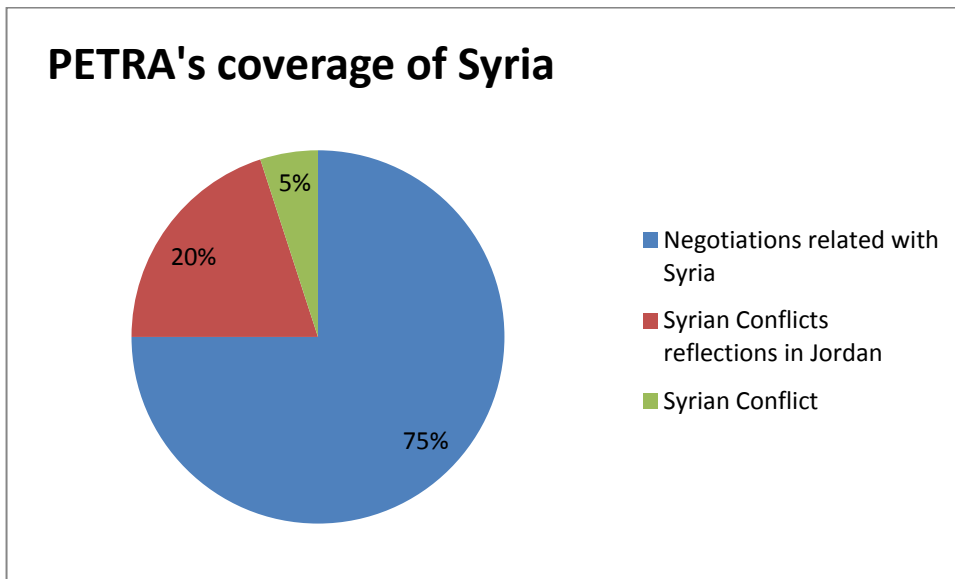
112 news, which are the subject of this study are analysed according to their contents. How much of these news are related with Syrian conflict, negotiations or Syrian conflicts effects in the country; is revealed. In Lebanese News Agency, negotiations related with Syria is covered mostly (55%). Syrian conflict (18%) and its reflections in Lebanon (27%) has less representation.



Also in Anadolu Agency news; negotiations are covered at most (49%). Syrian Conflict (30%) and Syrian Conflicts reflections in Turkey (19%) has less representation.



Jordan News Agency also covers news related with negotiations regarding Syria (75%). Syrian Conflict (5%) and Syrian Conflicts reflections in Jordan (20%) has less representation.



All of the agencies give little space to Syrian Conflict even though subject is Syria. News Agencies give more space to news which are related with the reflections of Syrian Conflict to their own countries more than Syrian Conflict itself. The reason for this is, domestic issues are generally more important than international issues. Although Syria is a neighbour of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, still countries make news according to their foreign policies. So, their own interests are more important than objectivity. News Agencies could not fall outside of their foreign policies and governments interests.

## 6. Results

This study supports the idea that media is not different than other institutions. Both PETRA, AA and NNA news agencies are producing news on behalf of the ruling class to maintain its power and strength. News are parallel with their governments policies. Although they have different ownership structures, both autonomous, independent and dependent agencies are representatives of the prevailing opinion.

This work reflects that media content is driven by the dominant class. Its difficult to say that media is independent in a country which is governed by a Parliamentary monarchy. Therefore, the Jordan News Agency, is still in a position that reinforces the power of the ruling class. Interviews with the King and his statements covering the vast majority of the news also proves this situation. Foreign policy of Jordan is not reflected on the news to avoid a mass movement. Syria is a topic of news, when its related with refugees.

Anadolu Agency, that has an autonomous structure, reflects its foreign policy on the news. Syrian Opposition and the Coalition of Revolutionary Forces, the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian Organization for Human Rights are mostly represented on AA news. This also confirms this situation.

Its impossible to think that Lebanese News Agency, that is linked with Ministry of Intelligence, have a different perspective that Lebanon's foreign policy. However, the complex situation of the country is reflected on the news.

Syrian President Bashar Assad is only represented on Lebanese News Agency news, still with a little coverage. AA and PETRA, did not cover any statement or any other

thing about Assad's side. While Jordan News Agency ignores the situation in Syria, AA and PETRA take side and spoke of the damage which is caused by Assad, and ignore the damages that may have been caused by rebels.

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