

Ontological Security with its Widening and Deepening Boundaries: An Evaluation through a Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic Literature Review Lens

Sevgi Balkan-Şahin
Çağ University

Özge Çetiner
Çağ University

Abstract

Using rigorous bibliometric and systematic methodologies, this article comprehensively reviews academic studies on ontological security. Based on a Web of Science (WoS) retrieved dataset of 163 articles in International Relations and Political Science journals, the article has examined issues such as keywords, authorship, citation networks, and countries through bibliometric analysis. This quantitative analysis revealing the “widening” dimension of ontological security is complemented by a qualitative overview based on a systematic literature review to highlight the “deepening” dimension of ontological security. Together with an assessment of Turkish academia’s contribution to this widening and deepening literature, the article provides a map of ontological security for future studies.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, systematic literature review, ontological security, widening, deepening

1. Introduction

Embedded in psychology¹ and sociology², ontological security addresses the inner desire of self-identities for a sense of continuity and stability. By extending this concept originally applied at the individual level to states and other actors, international relations scholars have increasingly analyzed state behavior from the perspective of ontological security. By challenging the supremacy of physical security in international relations, ontological security studies have been successful in launching a new line of inquiry on a wide range of issues, including foreign policy, bilateral relations, populism, and social protests. This article analyzes a large dataset of the ontological security literature to examine the development and applications of this evolving field in international relations. By analyzing how ontological security is addressed in the literature, this article also aims to understand the position of

Sevgi Balkan-Şahin, Assoc. Prof., Department of International Relations, Çağ University,  0000-0001-7227-4359. Email: sbalkan@cag.edu.tr.

Özge Çetiner, Res. Asst., Department of International Relations, Çağ University,  0000-0002-4243-2624. Email: ozgecetiner@cag.edu.tr.

¹ Ronald David Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1960).

² Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

Turkish academia in this field.

The article intends to guide future studies by revealing first the “widening” aspect of ontological security within the framework of the expanding number of studies and scholars, and second its “deepening” aspect through the development of new concepts or their application to international relations. To materialize this objective, the article employs bibliometric analysis, a commonly used method for obtaining quantitative data on publication records of individuals, institutions, or countries on a particular subject. This method quantitatively examines the growing literature by using bibliometric measures including co-authorship networks or citation counts, allowing for the identification of trends, patterns, and areas in the field to guide future research.³ To complement the quantitative dimensions of ontological security with qualitative research, the article conducts a systematic literature review to present a synthesis of previous studies.

In recent years, the use of statistical programs has increased bibliometric analysis, which is a relatively new applied method in the international relations literature.⁴ Bibliometric analysis in the field of International Relations can be divided into three categories: examining the intellectual structure, development, and evolution of concepts/topics; country/region-based analysis; and journal-based analysis. Regarding the concepts/topics of this discipline, regionalization,⁵ globalization,⁶ international migration cooperation,⁷ international security,⁸ and core-periphery connections⁹ have been examined through bibliometric analysis. For example, Mehmetcik, Parlar-Dal, and Haksess have conducted a bibliometric analysis of Turkish foreign policy studies in the period from 1939 to 2022 to draw the boundaries of Turkish foreign policy studies and reveal collaborative interactions.¹⁰ Country/region-based bibliometric analyses have explored the discipline of International Relations in the USA¹¹, Europe¹², Russia and China¹³. The pioneering studies of Waever¹⁴ and Holsti¹⁵ have examined the prevalence of Anglo-American and US publishing patterns in international relations. A comparative analysis of country-based studies indicates that the International Relations discipline is predominantly influenced by Anglo-American and Western European

³ Hakan Mehmetcik, Emel Parlar Dal and Hasan Haksess, “Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis,” *Alternatives*, (2024): 2.

⁴ Hakan Mehmetcik and Hasan Haksess, “Turkish IR Journals through a Bibliometric Lens,” *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 12, no. 1 (2023): 62.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Xingjian Liu, Song Hong, and Yaolin Liu, “A Bibliometric Analysis of 20 Years of Globalization Research: 1990–2009,” *Globalization* 9, no. 2 (2012): 195–210.

⁷ Hanen Khaldi and Vicente Prado-Gascó, “Bibliometric Maps and Co-Word Analysis of the Literature on International Cooperation on Migration,” *Quality and Quantity* 55, no. 5 (2021): 1845–1869.

⁸ Muhammad Azfar Anwar, Zhou Rongting, Wang Dong, and Fahad Asmi, “Mapping the Knowledge of National Security in 21st Century a Bibliometric Study,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1-18.

⁹ Ersel Aydınli and Julie Mathews, “Are the Core and Periphery Irreconcilable? The Curious World of Publishing in Contemporary International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 1, no. 3 (2000): 289–303.

¹⁰ Mehmetcik, Parlar Dal and Haksess, “Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Studies,” 2.

¹¹ Peter Marcus Kristensen, “Revisiting the ‘American Social Science’-Mapping the Geography of International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 16, no. 3 (2015): 246-269.

¹² Ole Wæver, “The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 687–727.

¹³ Maria Mary Papageorgiou and Alena Vieira, “Mapping the Literature on China and Russia in IR and Area Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis (1990–2019),” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 27, no. 1 (2021): 155–181; Zhihui Zhang, Jason E. Rollins, and Evangelia Lipitakis, “China’s Emerging Centrality in the Contemporary International Scientific Collaboration Network,” *Scientometrics* 116, no. 2 (2018): 1075-1091.

¹⁴ Ole Wæver, “The Sociology of a not so International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 687-727.

¹⁵ Kalevi Jaakko Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985).

perspectives and its expansion on a global scale is closely tied to the economic and political growth of the non-Euro-American world.¹⁶ The growth of new powers in the international system has been reflected in the increasing number of publications and citations about Chinese studies, particularly since 2014. The key distinction between the Euro-American world and others is rooted in the different levels of collaboration and interaction. While the Euro-American world has relatively strong cooperation, China and Russia, for example, have been shown to have very minimal sustained collaboration.¹⁷

In Turkey, various studies have attempted to identify local journal trends by analyzing their publications, an effort that is also useful for showing the varying inclinations of the local discipline. Çokişler, for example, studied 316 articles in the 14 years of the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)-indexed journal *Uluslararası İlişkiler* [International Relations] to examine categories such as language, research type, keywords, topic, theories, countries, and authors;¹⁸ and Al, Soydal and Yalçın used CiteSpace to examine 100 articles published in the SSCI-indexed *Bilig* journal.¹⁹ Mehmetcik and Hakses conducted a comparative analysis of the scientific contributions of three highly regarded Turkish International Relations journals, namely, the aforementioned *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, as well as Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)-indexed *All Azimuth* and *Insight Turkey*, based on data obtained from the WoS database and using R software.²⁰

Given the growth in ontological security studies in International Relations and Political Sciences, bibliometric studies provide a way forward to address shortcomings and gaps. For instance, Mehmetcik, Parlar-Dal, and Hakses have indicated that the field of Turkish foreign policy is shaped by a small group of productive and influential scholars and that there is a low level of cooperation among Turkish foreign policy scholars, highlighting the points that need to be strengthened for the creation of a strong research community.²¹ Bibliometric analysis can further guide new researchers by indicating which authors and publications to follow to keep abreast of scholarly developments in a given field or topic.

Contributing to the above-mentioned studies, this article utilizes data (a total of 163 articles) collected from WoS, a platform commonly used for bibliometric data in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and visualizes the results by using VOSviewer. This analysis conducted through the VOSviewer program provides a quantitative evaluation of authors, keywords, countries, citations, and publication years of 163 articles. To conduct a comprehensive overview of themes and tendencies on ontological security, the article also classifies the 163 articles by using systematic literature review through the MAXQDA program. Apart from identifying current trends, research agendas, and prominent contributions in the field of ontological security, this article also reveals the productivity of Turkish authors and academic studies conducted in Turkey.

By mapping the trends and patterns in the ontological security literature to identify and elucidate the gaps, this article is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the ontological security perspective, which is the subject of the article. The second part explains

¹⁶ Kristensen, "Revisiting the 'American Social Science,'" 264.

¹⁷ Papageorgiou and Vieira, "Mapping the Literature on China and Russia in IR and Area Studies," 177.

¹⁸ Elvan Çokişler, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisinin Bibliyometrik Analizi (2004-2017)," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 16, no. 64 (2019): 29–56.

¹⁹ Umut Al, İrem Soydal, and Haydar Yalçın, "Bibliyometrik Özellikleri Açısından Bilig'in Değerlendirilmesi," *Bilig* 55, (2010): 1-20.

²⁰ Mehmetcik and Hakses, "Turkish IR Journals through a Bibliometric Lens," 62.

²¹ Mehmetcik, Parlar Dal and Hakses, "Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Studies," 18.

the methodology and research design of the article. The last part analyzes the data obtained through VOSviewer and MAXQDA and evaluates the findings.

2. Ontological Security

Analyses that seek to comprehend and elucidate global-local politics and social relations in international relations by taking into consideration the effect of emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, hatred, arrogance, and humiliation, have enabled ontological security studies to become a pervasive field of study.²² Ontological security, which is rooted in psychology²³ and sociology²⁴, has been addressed in recent decades in International Relations at the level of the state, international organizations, and agents, to provide a new perspective on concepts such as conflict, sovereignty, and foreign policy via the synthesis of securitization, identity, and emotional politics.²⁵ Ontological security can be defined as the belief in the uninterrupted continuity of one's self-identity and the unwavering stability of one's actions within the social and physical environment.²⁶ Giddens notes that a period of uncertainty characterized by the disruption of self-identity and routines in the social and physical environment, in which individuals lack clarity about the "new" situation, can lead to existential anxiety. To avoid these ontological insecurities and uncertainties, Kinnvall and Mitzen point out that actions must be underpinned by a continuous self-narrative.²⁷ Routines and self-narratives reinforce the basic trust system that allows actors to continue with their daily lives by suppressing their ontological concerns about their relationship with the outside world.²⁸

Given that states, like individuals, seek ontological security, it is generally accepted that ontological security in international relations includes the security of the "self" of states.²⁹ Rumelili's concept of "security as being" rather than "security as survival" provides a framework for understanding why states engage in foreign policy actions that may even endanger their physical security.³⁰ These actions are driven by the desire to maintain continuity of identity, self-security, and self-narratives. By engaging in behaviors that extend beyond the physical existence and necessitate recognition from other actors, states endeavor to maintain consistency³¹ and stability, as well as to adhere to certain routines.³² Moreover, protracted conflicts are perceived as constructing identity, and the quest for peace is seen as creating an ontological security dilemma that provides physical security but causes ontological insecurity. In a similar vein, the "humane or moral" behaviors of actors are considered to be motivated by the desire to support their self-narratives, as was the case in Britain's neutrality

²² Aşlı Ilgıt, "Ontolojik Güvenlik: Güvenliği (Yeniden) Okurken Kimlikler ve Duygular," in *Güvenliği Yeniden Okumak: Güvenlik Çalışmalarında Kavramlar, Aktörler ve Güncel Konular*, eds. Harun Arkan and Ali Gök, (Ankara: Yetkin Yayınları, 2024): 78.

²³ Laing, *The Divided Self*.

²⁴ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*.

²⁵ Ilgıt, "Ontolojik Güvenlik: Güvenliği (Yeniden) Okurken Kimlikler ve Duygular," 77.

²⁶ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 92.

²⁷ Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Security in World Politics," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 3.

²⁸ Bahar Rumelili and Umut Can Adısoğmez, "Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kimlik-Güvenlik İlişisine Dair Yeni Bir Paradigma: Ontolojik Güvenlik Teorisi," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 17, no. 66 (2020): 25; Felix Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a National Biography," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 1 (2014): 270.

²⁹ Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 344-345.

³⁰ Bahar Rumelili, "Identity and Desecuritization: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18 (2015): 52.

³¹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 341; Catarina Kinnvall, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India* (London, Routledge, 2006), 30-31.

³² Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.

during the American Civil War or NATO's intervention in Kosovo.³³ In addition to states and international organizations seeking for ontological security and biographical continuity, ontological (in)security is also considered as a constructed phenomenon at the political-agent level. The articulation of crisis narratives by political agents facilitates the instillation of ontological insecurity within society, which in turn provides the basis for the formulation of policy agendas aimed at restoring a sense of normalcy by transforming society's anxiety into trust and confidence.³⁴

The ontological security perspective conceptualizes those situations that disrupt the continuity of self-narratives and identity as "critical situations". By causing existential anxieties in individuals and societies, critical situations are considered as leading to ontological insecurity. Giddens defines this concept as a set of conditions/circumstances that radically disrupt the usual daily life routines.³⁵ Steele draws upon Giddens to explain that critical situations are unexpected issues that affect a significant number of individuals and disrupt their self-identities.³⁶

Unlike these early studies, which did not distinguish between different levels of "anxiety", recent studies grounded in Laing's³⁷ distinction between normal and neurotic anxiety have drawn attention to the possibility that anxiety might lead to positive and negative outcomes respectively³⁸. Gustafsson and Nina C. Krickel-Choi have emphasized that while normal anxiety triggers creativity in situations where change is necessary, neurotic anxiety causes existential concerns that immobilize the actor.³⁹ Studies using this distinction have criticized the concept of "control or elimination of anxiety".

The Lacanian perspective has emerged as another innovative approach in the literature on conceptual analysis. One of the basic Lacanian notions is *jouissance*, which is characterized by pleasure and pain/paradoxes/ambiguities. In this understanding, the dismantling of the established international order in times of crisis can present challenges for states, which may find themselves struggling to maintain their position in the international system and navigate the complex dynamics of regional and global politics. In such periods of crisis, states may seek the acceptance of powerful actors to gain international prestige to restore their sense of identity. Nevertheless, this impulsive quest and the satisfaction it bestows can have detrimental consequences for states, prompting them to forsake their international alliances, prestige, and economic prosperity.⁴⁰ Adisönmez and Öztığ examine this situation through the lens of Turkish foreign policy, investigating how multilevel crises, such as the Syrian Civil War and the July 15 coup attempt, disrupted Justice and Development Party

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alexandra Homolar and Ronny Scholz, "The Power of Trump-Speak: Populist Crisis Narratives and Ontological Security," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 344; Jelena Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (2016): 611-612.

³⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradictions in Social Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 124.

³⁶ Steele, "Ontological Security in International Relations," 12.

³⁷ Laing, *The Divided Self*, 149.

³⁸ Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 31-47; Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and beyond Giddens," *International Theory* 12, no. 2 (2020): 240-256; Bahar Rumelili and Ayşe Betül Çelik, "Ontological Insecurity in Asymmetric Conflicts: Reflections on Agonistic Peace in Turkey's Kurdish Issue," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 4 (2017): 279-296.

³⁹ Karl Gustafsson and Nina C. Krickel-Choi, "Returning to the Roots of Ontological Security: Insights from T-the Existentialist Anxiety Literature," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2020): 875-895.

⁴⁰ Umut Can Adisönmez and Laçın İdil Öztığ, "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy: Crisis, Disorder, and Disorientation," *Critical Studies on Security* (2024): 5-7.

leadership's sense of order and its neurotic search for recognition as a key regional player.⁴¹ On the other hand, by examining the EU-Turkey relationship over the period 2002-2023 through this concept, Ermihan reveals a clear transition from a period of jouissance to one of resentment and finally to a stage of liberation in Turkey's relations with the EU.⁴²

Recent discussions in the literature have also explored the development of innovative critical concepts of ontological security. By formulating novelty, for example, Sandal and Öztürk combine desecuritization and ontological security under what they call the "desecuritization of the self," to examine how authoritarian actors ensure their ontological security.⁴³ Moreover, the concepts of "perpetual ontological crises" to explain the effects of dominant identity structures,⁴⁴ "ontological dissonance" to critique a single or limited number of identity understandings,⁴⁵ and "security of the self in the body" to assess the reciprocal relations between physical and psychological security,⁴⁶ are formulated.

While various case study research papers on the concept have been providing new and interesting perspectives, criticisms have also begun pointing out potential limitations. In this regard, a bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review can provide a detailed picture of the widening and deepening dimensions of the concept and pave the way for the development of different approaches (both in terms of case-study and new concepts).

3. Methodology and Research Design

Bibliometric analysis, a statistical classification and analysis of studies, was first introduced in 1923 by E. Wyndham Hulme as "Statistical Bibliography" and later as "bibliometrics" by Pritchard and Gross.⁴⁷ This method comprehensively examines research topics by ranking institutions, journals, or authors that are prominent in a given field to measure scientific contributions.⁴⁸ The development of the literature is shown by analyzing the frequency of keywords, co-author networks, the most productive authors, or the most cited authors.

Bibliometrics provides a statistical analysis to quantitatively evaluate whether studies share common characteristics based on specific criteria.⁴⁹ Such an analysis reveals the overall productivity of a research area by characterizing the structure and development of scientific fields, disciplines, or research topics.⁵⁰ This contribution can be useful for the design of future studies.⁵¹ Additionally, bibliometric analyses based on journal reviews offer valuable insights

⁴¹ Ibid., 1-22.

⁴² Erman Ermihan, "End of Jouissance, Start of Resentment: A Lacanian Critical Security Approach to Turkey's Relations with the West," *Critical Studies on Security* (2024): 1-19.

⁴³ Nukhet Ahu Sandal and Ahmet Erdi Ozturk, "Critical Junctures of Securitisation: The Case of the AK Party in Turkey," *Alternatives* 48, no. 1 (2023): 38-53.

⁴⁴ Chris Deacon, "Perpetual Ontological Crisis: National Division, Enduring Anxieties and South Korea's Discursive Relationship with Japan," *European Journal of International Relations* 29, no. 4 (2023): 1041-1065.

⁴⁵ Amir Lupovici, "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps towards the Palestinians," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 809-833.

⁴⁶ Nina C. Krickel-Choi, "The Embodied State: Why and How Physical Security Matters for Ontological Security," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25, no. 1 (2022): 159-181.

⁴⁷ Edward Wyndham Hulme, *Statistical Bibliography in Relation to the Growth of Modern Civilization: Two Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge in May 1922* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1923); Ole V. Groos and Alan Pritchard, "Documentation Notes," *Journal of Documentation* 25, no. 4 (1969): 344-349.

⁴⁸ Ole Ellegaard and Johan A. Wallin, "The Bibliometric Analysis of Scholarly Production: How Great is the Impact?," *Scientometrics* 105, no. 3 (2015): 1809-1831.

⁴⁹ Ana Andrés, *Measuring Academic Research: How to Undertake a Bibliometric Study*, (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2009).

⁵⁰ Robert N. Broadus, "Toward a Definition of 'Bibliometrics,'" *Scientometrics* 12, no. 5-6 (1987): 373-379.

⁵¹ Stephen Majebi Lawani, "Bibliometrics: Its Theoretical Foundations, Methods and Applications," *Libri* 31, no. 4 (1981): 294-315.

to editorial boards and authors, allowing them to make better decisions.⁵² Encompassing five stages -study design, data collection, data analysis, data visualization, and interpretation⁵³- bibliometric analysis is a rapidly developing field within the discipline of international relations.

Using the advantage of quantitative precision and objectivity in the segmentation of the literature through bibliometric analysis, together with the qualitative contribution of a systematic literature review, this article offers a comprehensive panorama of the research community on ontological security. The bibliometric analysis uses WoS, a database commonly used in bibliometric data studies in the social sciences.

Certain filters were applied to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the extensive literature in the field of ontological security studies. First, to access publications directly related to ontological security, publications with “ontological security”⁵⁴ in their titles⁵⁵ were filtered. The filtering helped exclude studies that did not focus on ontological security as the main topic, such as publications that only have a passing reference to the term in their literature review. Secondly, this article is limited to publications in the fields of “International Relations”, “Political Science”, and “Area Studies”, which were the most published categories, and thereby excluded studies that could be considered irrelevant to critical security studies. For example, the analysis revealed that the term ‘ontological security’ is multidisciplinary and can be found in many different fields, such as software engineering, economics, transportation, archaeology, management, psychology and sociology, without being relevant to critical security studies. Studies in areas such as economics, environmental studies, and women’s studies were included if the WoS category/classification *also* included International Relations or Political Science. This filtering was also essential for the systematic literature review, as excluding irrelevant fields ensured that the focus remained on new concepts related specifically to critical security studies.

As a third step, the search was restricted to an analysis of “articles”⁵⁶ as the type of document, considering that peer-reviewed academic journals are a crucial means of producing and disseminating scientific knowledge.⁵⁷ Even though book publishing is an ongoing practice, in an increasingly metrics-driven higher education environment, social scientists have become more focused on journal publishing due to its higher citation rates.⁵⁸ The increase in journal publishing has led to a rise in specialized academic journals as the primary means for producing and distributing scientific knowledge.⁵⁹ Therefore, articles published in leading journals provide a rich source of data to evaluate general/central trends. Even though the perspectives presented in book chapters may contribute significantly to the literature, the main reason for their exclusion is the lack of an abstract -at least-, which is crucial for conducting a qualitative systematic literature review⁶⁰. Following the applied filters, a total

⁵² Mehmetcik and Haksas, “Turkish IR Journals through a Bibliometric Lens,” 65.

⁵³ Ivan Zupic and Tomaž Čater, “Bibliometric Methods in Management and Organization,” *Organizational Research Methods* 18, no. 3 (2015): 429-472.

⁵⁴ The terms “ontological security,” “ontological insecurity” and “ontological (in)security” were used for filtering.

⁵⁵ While various search options are available, such as topic, author, publication title, funding agency, and publisher, the “title” filter was selected to identify studies directly related to this topic.

⁵⁶ Book chapters and proceeding papers are excluded.

⁵⁷ Çoşkuşler, “Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisinin Bibliyometrik Analizi (2004-2017),” 30.

⁵⁸ Muhsuan Huang and Yu-wei Chang, “Characteristics of Research Output in Social Sciences and Humanities: From a Research Evaluation Perspective,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59, no. 11 (2008): 1819-1828.

⁵⁹ Mehmetcik and Haksas, “Turkish IR Journals through a Bibliometric Lens,” 61-62.

⁶⁰ The systematic literature review was conducted by uploading articles to the MAXQDA program. Coding in this program

of 163 articles were obtained from the SSCI, ESCI and Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI),⁶¹ which are the main social science indexes in the WoS Core Collection. Even though bibliometric analysis can be used to analyze large-scale datasets, filtering was considered important for this study, as it aimed to complement bibliometric analysis with systematic literature review. A total of 163 articles⁶² obtained as a result of the filtering were analyzed in depth by using MAXQDA. Table 1 lists the filters applied to the dataset.

Table 1. Filters in Dataset

Description	Criteria	Results
Title	“ontological security”, “ontological insecurity” or “ontological (in)security”	381 publications
Web of Science Categories	International Relations, Political Science and Area Studies	215 publications
Document Types	Refining “Article” and excluding book chapters and proceedings papers	163 articles

The article did not need language filtering, as the availability of at least English abstracts for all the articles allowed for systematic literature review. The actual results showed that 159 of the 163 articles were written in English, with just two articles written in Spanish, one in Russian, and one in Turkish. After applying all filters to the dataset, this article utilized the VOSviewer program for bibliometric analysis and the MAXQDA program for systematic literature review to visualize 163 articles.

4. Findings

The bibliometric analysis of works on ontological security studies indicates that the literature on this topic has been evolving over the last 20 years, with the majority of articles having been produced in recent years. Despite minor fluctuations in the number of published articles, ontological security studies have consistently produced over 13 articles per year since 2017. Presenting the yearly scientific production, Figure 1 shows that a total of 22 articles (13%) were written from 2004 to 2016, while 141 articles (87%) have been published since 2017. The rapid increases in academic production after 2017 reflect that ontological security studies are gaining traction in the literature. Considering that the initial studies introduced ontological security to the international relations literature, it can be argued that critical approaches and diverse case studies, which collectively constitute critical security studies, have become more robust since 2017.

was only possible when at least the abstracts of the studies were available.

⁶¹ In addition to the aforementioned indexes, the Web of Science database includes the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-Expanded), Book Citation Index-Social Sciences & Humanities (BKCI-SSH), Conference Proceedings Citation Index-Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH), and Conference Proceedings Citation Index-Science (CPCI-S) indexes. Following the filtering process, articles from the three specified indexes were obtained, and no further index filtering was conducted. These three indexes provide a comprehensive overview of the leading journals in the field.

⁶² The original number of articles was 165, but two were found to be repeated, resulting in a total of 163. A detailed analysis of the dataset revealed that the articles authored by Hürsoy and Özün-Çöllüoğlu in 2022 and by Stankovic and Topalovic in 2023 were included twice.

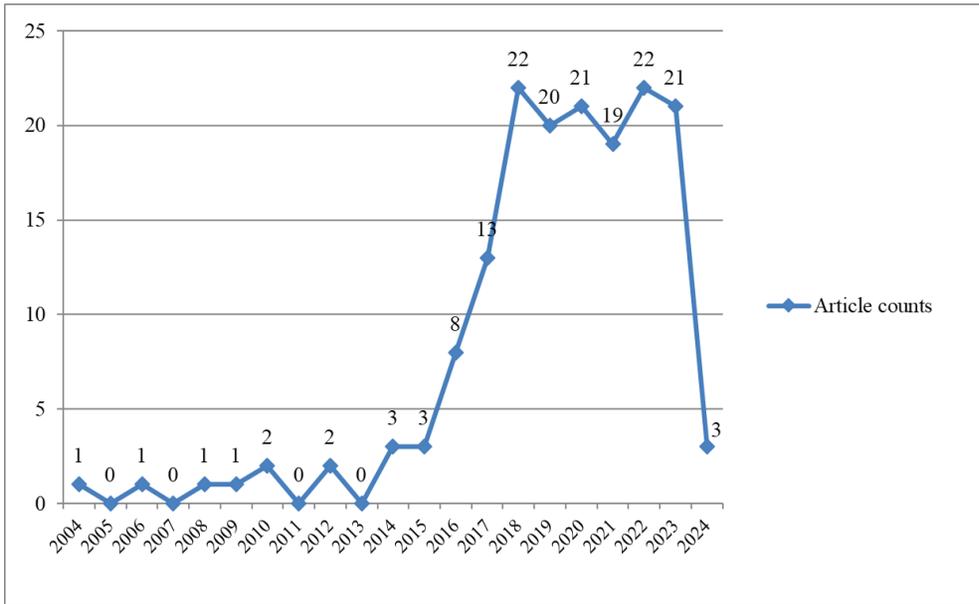


Figure 1. Distribution of Article Counts between 2004-2024⁶³

Table 2 shows the most productive authors and countries producing works in the ontological security literature, among a total of 161 authors⁶⁴ and 37 countries⁶⁵. Aside from the pioneers of the theory (Catarina Kinnvall, Brent Steele, Jennifer Mitzen, and Vincent Della Sala), who introduced ontological security to the literature of International Relations and Political Science, the author analysis indicates that Nina C. Krickel-Choi, Christopher Browning and Filip Ejodus are among the most productive authors, with at least four articles each. Moreover, Umut Can Adı̇sönmez (four articles), Bahar Rumelili (five articles), Recep Onursal (three articles), and Ayşe Zarakol (three articles) are the most productive Turkish academics with their qualified studies. Furthermore, Ayşe Betül Çelik, Melis Özün Çöllüođlu, Siret Hürsoy, Aslı Ilgıt, İdil Laçın Öztıđı, Özlem Kayhan Pusane and Nasuh Sofuođlu have made Turkey among the most productive countries in ontological security studies, and represent the country on the international scale. Out of 37 countries, the most productive country is England with 46 articles, while Turkey ranks fourth with 12 articles. Ethiopia, Finland, Indonesia, Iran, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Romania, Slovenia, Russia, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, and Wales are the countries that have done the least amount of study, with one article each.

⁶³ The data were downloaded from the WoS database on March 30, 2024.

⁶⁴ While the initial VOSviewer analysis of authors in the field identified 166 authors, a more detailed examination revealed certain overlaps in names and thus double entries: Siret Hürsoy (as Huersoy), Melis Çöllüođlu (as Coellueoglu), Jennifer Mitzen (as J. Mitzen), Christopher S. Browning (as Christopher Browning), and Catarina Kinnvall (as C. Kinnvall). In order to avoid confusion, the analyses include these authors with one single, full name format, taking into consideration the aforementioned mistakes.

⁶⁵ The dataset includes two distinct ways of referring to the country of Türkiye and Turkey.

Table 2. Most Productive Authors and Countries

Most Productive Authors	Number of Articles
Brent Steele	7
Catarina Kinnvall	6
Nina C. Krickel-Choi	5
Bahar Rumelili	5
Jennifer Mitzen	4
Umut Can Adisönmez	4
Vincent Della Sala	4
Christopher Browning	4
Filip Ejodus	4
Karl Gustafsson	4
Christine Agius	3
Maria Malksoo	3
Recep Onursal	3
Derek Bolton	3
Ayşe Zarakol	3

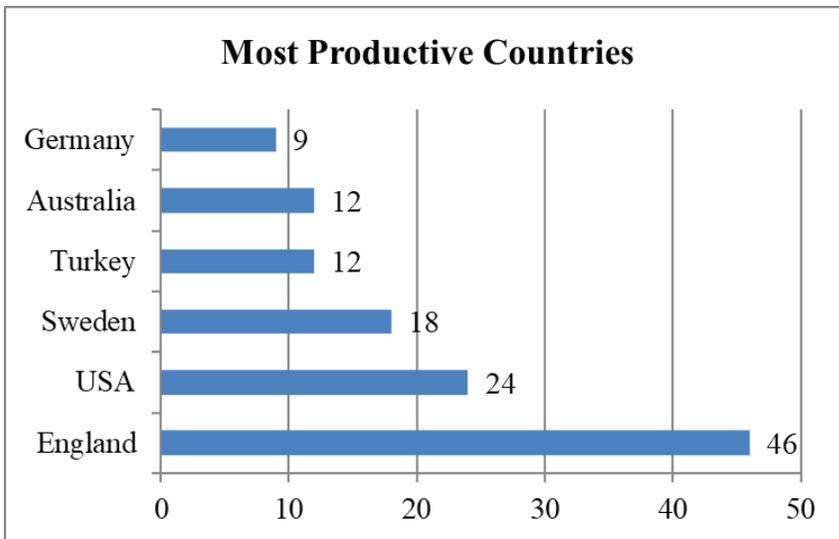


Table 3 displays the author dominance analysis for the most productive authors, which indicates the frequency of single-authored studies in the dataset. The analysis examined the productivity of authors, revealing that the majority of articles were written by a single author. Among single-authored studies, it is evident that Brent Steele, Nina C. Krickel-Choi, Vincent Della Sala, Filip Ejodus, Maria Malksoo, and Derek Bolton are the most prominent authors, having each published a total of three articles.

Table 3. The Author Dominance Analysis

Most Productive Authors	Number of Articles	Single-Authored	Multi-Authored
Brent Steele	7	3	4
Catarina Kinnvall	6	2	4
Nina C. Krickel-Choi	5	3	2
Bahar Rumelili	5	2	3
Jennifer Mitzen	4	2	2
Umut Can Adısönmez	4	0	4
Vincent Della Sala	4	3	1
Christopher Browning	4	2	2
Filip Ejdus	4	3	1
Karl Gustafsson	4	2	2
Christine Agius	3	2	1
Maria Malksoo	3	3	0
Recep Onursal	3	0	3
Derek Bolton	3	3	0
Ayşe Zarakol	3	2	1

The analysis of the author collaboration network demonstrates patterns of communication, collaboration, and knowledge exchange in the field. It presents how authors are connected through co-authorship and allows researchers to identify significant authors and research groups in the field. The extent of collaboration among them can be investigated by analyzing the author collaboration network.⁶⁶ The analysis also reveals highly collaborative authors. Each item (circle) in Figure 2 represents an author. Links between authors show co-authorship relationships. Accordingly, Figure 2 shows author collaborations with at least two articles. Overall, the results in Figure 2 reveal low levels of collaboration patterns, confirming a lack of focus on collaborative work. While author collaboration is not dominant in ontological security studies, the limited collaboration that has occurred in Turkey has involved three scholars: Bahar Rumelili, Umut Can Adısönmez and Recep Onursal. In addition to the analysis of the author collaboration network, Figure 3 illustrates the co-authorship relationships between institutions that have at least two articles. The size of the items represents the number of articles. Figure 3 indicates the limited number of collaborations in the ontological security studies.

⁶⁶ Mehmetcik, Parlar Dal and Haksas, "Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Studies," 12.



Figure 2. Author Collaboration Networks



Figure 3. Institution Collaboration Networks

The citation analysis reflects the intellectual structure of the discipline, with an examination of the most cited authors revealing a Western dominance in the literature. Table 4 presents a ranking of the most cited authors—those who have received at least 100 citations. Catarina Kinnvall, who has the largest number of articles, is also the most cited author. Stuart Croft, Pertti Joenniemi, Alanna Krolikowski, Michael Skey, Marco A. Vierira and Jakub Eberle are among the most cited authors, although they are not on the list of the most productive authors. Regarding Turkish authors, Zarakol ranks second and Rumelili ranks eighth.

Table 4. The Most Cited Authors

Most Productive Authors	Total Number of Articles	Total Number of Citations
Catarina Kinnvall	6	919
Ayşe Zarakol	3	354
Jelena Subotic	2	297
Jennifer Mitzen	4	291
Christopher Browning	4	240
Stuart Croft	2	171
Brent Steele	7	160
Bahar Rumelili	5	152
Karl Gustafsson	4	136
Pertti Joenniemi	1	121
Christine Agius	3	109
Alanna Krolikowski	2	108
Michael Skey	1	102
Filip Ejdus	4	101

The cited articles are another important aspect of the citation analysis. Citation analysis for authors shows the total number of citations, while citation analysis for articles shows the most cited studies. In their comprehensive reviews, Dale and Goldfinch⁶⁷ and Waismel-Manor and Lowi⁶⁸ highlight the significance of citation analysis as a method for identifying the transmission of ideas. Figure 4 presents the top 25 most cited articles—those with at least 50 citations. Each item in the figure represents a study, and the links between the items indicate their relations in terms of citation. Analysis reveals that although Chris Rossdale is not the most cited or productive author, his 2015 study is one of the most cited articles, with 83 citations. However, Kinnvall (2004) with 655 citations, Subotic (2016) with 253 citations, Zarakol (2010) with 245 citations, Mitzen (2006) with 139 citations, Browning (2017) with 121 citations, Croft (2012) with 117 citations and Skey (2010) with 102 citations, are the most cited documents. The article with the highest number of citations representing Turkey is Rumelili (2017), with 59 citations, as well as two articles by the Turkish author Ayşe Zarakol (2010; 2017) with 245 and 63 citations, respectively.

⁶⁷ Tony Dale and Shaun Goldfinch, "Article Citation Rates and Productivity of Australasian Political Science Units 1995–2002," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (2005): 425–434.

⁶⁸ Israel Waismel-Manor and Theodore J. Lowi, "Politics in Motion: A Personal History of Political Science," *New Political Science* 33, no.1 (2011): 59–78.

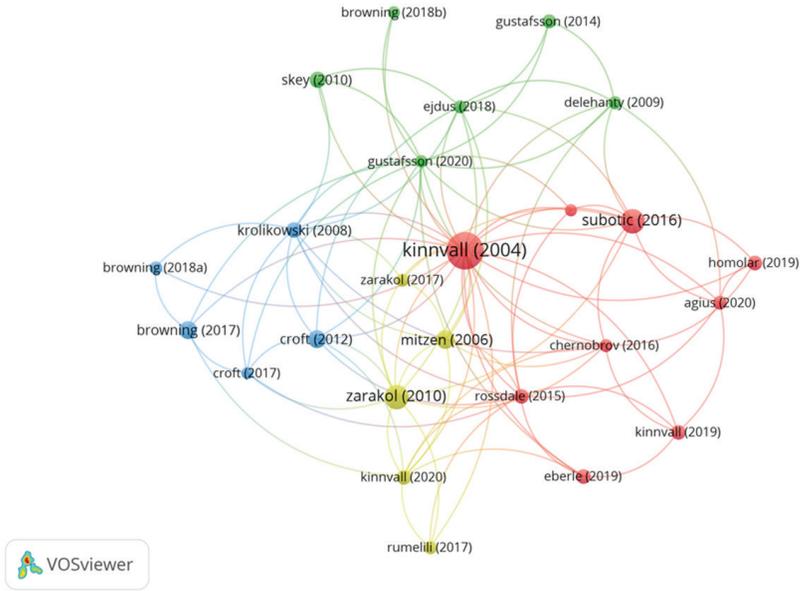


Figure 4. The Most Cited Articles with at least 50 Citations

The sources (journals) included in the bibliometric dataset are those that contribute to the advancement of knowledge, as evidenced by the indexes in which they are listed. Figure 5 indicates the most relevant sources for ontological security—those with at least three articles. The links between journals show proximity in terms of citation relationships, and the same color groups represent greater relations. Among these sources, the journals of *Uluslararası İlişkiler* and *Alternatives* are edited by Turkish academics.

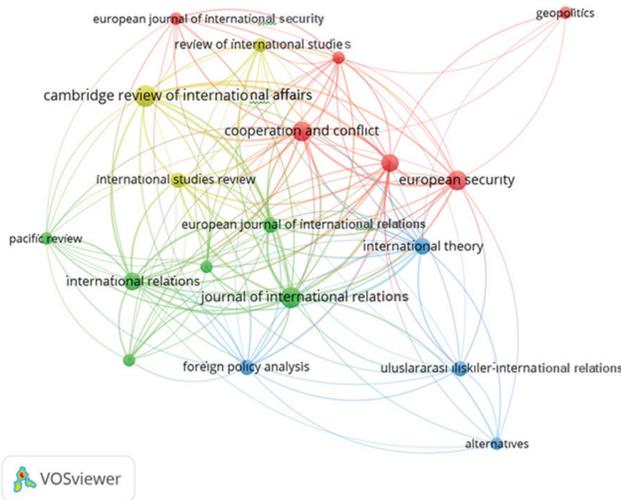


Figure 5. Sources with at least Three Documents

Although the bibliometrics performed by VOSviewer reveal the “widening” dimension of ontological security studies, an examination of the “deepening” dimension in this field remains incomplete. While keyword analysis provides a picture of the most used words and the connections between them in the general literature,⁶⁹ it does not offer a sufficient level of analysis of the studies’ content. To overcome this limitation, articles were classified through MAXQDA by using qualitative review.

Regarding the research type, the articles are analyzed based on the keyword classification criteria of Aydınli and Mathews. Accordingly, articles that used theoretical terms in their keywords are classified as theoretical, while studies that applied a theory in a particular country, region, or event are classified as applied/case studies.⁷⁰ The analysis shows that almost 17% of the articles were theoretical, while 83% were case studies. It also reveals that there has been a clear shift towards case studies since Kinnvall’s study in 2004, which introduced the concept of ontological security to international relations.

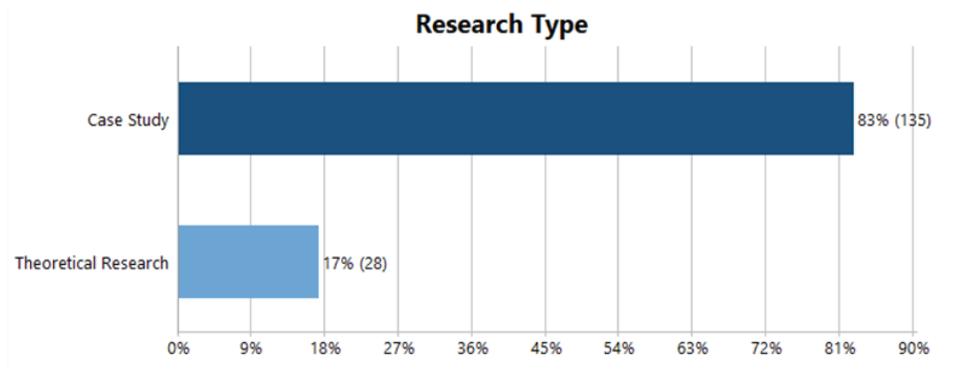


Figure 7. Research Type

The analysis of article topics has the potential to reveal the issues that academics in the field are focusing on. Figure 8 illustrates the topics of studies that endeavor to contribute to the field and the most examined regions that have been the subject of the articles. The result reveals that Russia and Sweden are among the most studied countries, despite having fewer studies in the country-based analysis seen in Table 2. Additionally, the number of studies conducted in Turkey and Germany is comparable to those in the most studied regions, indicating that researchers in these regions are actively conducting research related to their regions. Notably, studies on Turkey are primarily conducted by researchers residing in the country. For example, the political discourse surrounding the issue of state survival in Turkey,⁷¹ the emotional context of Turkey-KRG relations,⁷² Kurdish issue,⁷³ and rising tensions between Greece and Turkey⁷⁴ are elucidated by Turkish academics.

⁶⁹ Mehmetcik and Haksess, “Turkish IR Journals through a Bibliometric Lens,” 56.

⁷⁰ Aydınli and Mathews, “Are the Core and Periphery Irreconcilable?,” 292.

⁷¹ Umut Can Adısönmez and Recep Onursal, ““Strong, but Anxious State,” The Fantasmatic Narratives on Ontological Insecurity and Anxiety in Turkey,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 19, no. 73 (2022): 65-79.

⁷² Özlem Kayhan-Pusane and Aslı Ilgıt, “Ontological Insecurity, Anxiety, and Hubris: An Affective Account of Turkey-KRG Relations,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 19, no. 73 (2022): 99-115.

⁷³ Rumelili and Çelik, “Ontological Insecurity in Asymmetric Conflicts,” 279-296.

⁷⁴ Bahar Rumelili and Nasuh Sofuoglu, “Ontological Insecurity and the Return of the Greek-Turkish Conflicts: Reconfiguring Hagia Sophia as an Ontic Space,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2024): 1-19.

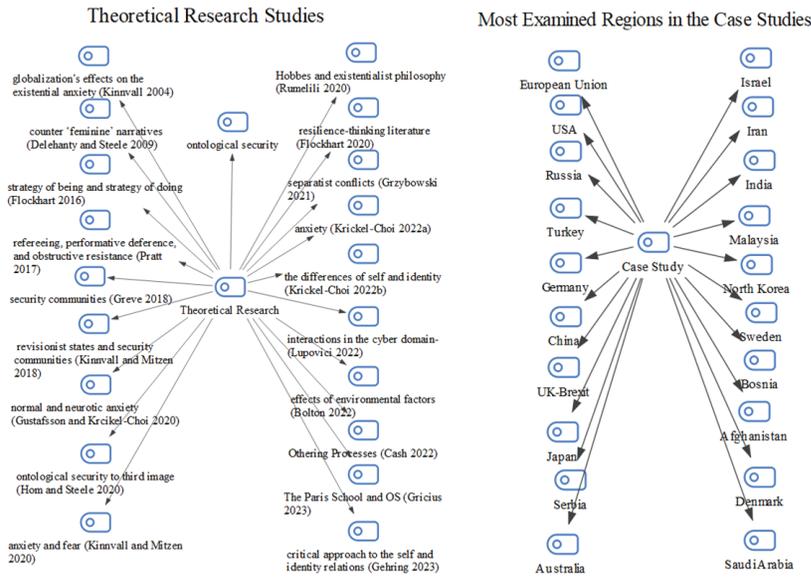


Figure 8. Theoretical and Case Studies

Articles aiming to provide novelty in terms of theories or case studies can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of those that have focused on an in-depth analysis of concepts in an attempt to clarify ontological security, as indicated in the theory section of this article. In addition to the adaptation of new concepts to international relations like “object-cause of desire”, a key concept in the Lacanian perspective, the articles examined in the analysis also clarify the existing concepts by explaining the differences between terms such as normal anxiety/neurotic anxiety,⁷⁵ and self/identity.⁷⁶ To fill the gaps in the literature, scholars also formulate and use new concepts such as “mission narratives”⁷⁷ and “ontological security dilemma”⁷⁸ and “temporal security”⁷⁹.

The second set of articles aims to enhance this literature by exploring ontological security through different topics. Lupovici (2022), for example, investigates the impact on states of interactions in “cyberspace,” and how states respond to these challenges, while Lerner (2023) focuses on ontological security and “global injustices”, understanding global injustices specific to the international system as the main producers of ontological insecurity in terms of destabilizing identities and undermining the search for ontological security. The last group consists of articles addressing different theories. Upon examination of the articles, it was found that they address other international relations theories, including the Paris School, securitization, normative theory, realism, postcolonial theory, and feminism.

Evaluating articles not only on the basis of their topics but also on their methodology

⁷⁵ Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi, “Returning to the Roots of Ontological Security,” 875-895.

⁷⁶ Krickel-Choi, “The Embodied State,” 159-181.

⁷⁷ Alicja Curanović and Piotr Szymański, “Mission Saves Us All: Great Russia and Global Britain Dealing with Ontological Insecurity,” *International Relations* 38, no. 4 (2022): 1-25.

⁷⁸ Chih-yu Shih and Jason Luo, “Ontological Security Dilemma: A Practical Model of Relational Deterrence,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 29, no. 2 (2023): 1-24.

⁷⁹ Kathrin Bachleitner, “Ontological Security as Temporal Security? The Role of ‘Significant Historical Others’ in World Politics,” *International Relations* 37, no. 1 (2023): 25-47.

reveals that ontological security studies primarily rely on discourse analysis and its variations, as shown in Figure 9. It can be said that the quantitative articles are primarily based on surveys, content analysis, and public polls.

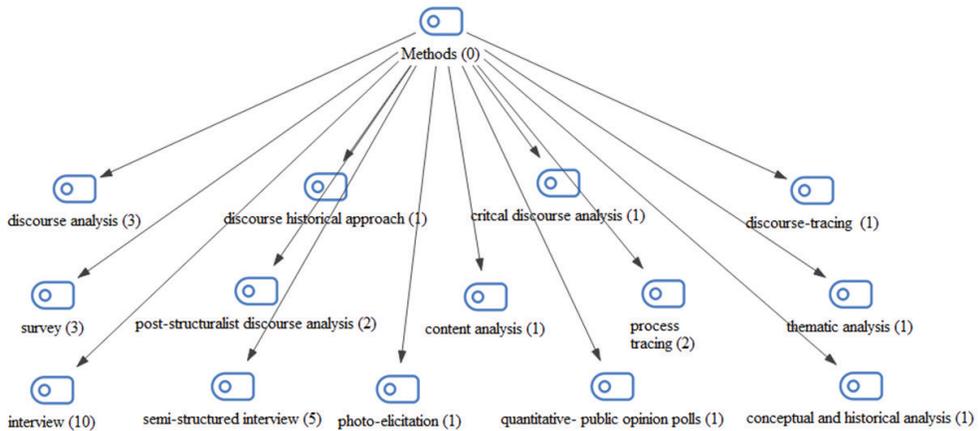


Figure 9. Methods in the Articles on Ontological Security

5. Conclusion

This article has explored the academic literature on ontological security by conducting a bibliometric analysis that uses algorithms like clustering and multidimensional scaling to visualize relationships among units of analysis, such as authors, citations, and countries. As the concept of ontological security is a multidisciplinary topic, it has been necessary to apply filtering to ensure that the focus has remained on critical security studies. Examining a total of 163 articles simplified by filters, this study used the VOSviewer tool for bibliometric analysis and the MAXQDA program for a systematic literature review.

The use of bibliometric analysis, which makes it possible to identify the most prolific writers in a certain time frame, revealed that the majority of works on ontological security have been published recently, particularly since 2017. The data identified 161 authors from 37 nations as the most productive authors in the ontological security literature. With 46 articles, England ranks as the most-producing nation, and Turkey, with 12 articles, comes in fourth.

Analysis of co-author networks, most referenced publications, and frequently used keywords are all important tools that may be used to analyze the evolution of the literature in a certain field. By examining co-authorship through measuring the number of co-authored publications, and citation networks by noting the frequency with which scholars quote one another, this study has revealed those groups of researchers who are working together and also those studies that build upon one another. This study's analysis of author collaboration networks, which demonstrate patterns of cooperation and knowledge exchange, has revealed low levels of collaboration patterns in ontological security studies. The citation analysis, which reviews the most referenced authors and reflects the intellectual structure of the discipline has shown that Western authors predominate in the literature. A keyword analysis,

highlighting key study themes in the field, investigating connections between various research areas, and helping identify underdeveloped areas for further research, revealed a total of 415 distinct keywords being used, including “ontological security”, “Russia”, “anxiety”, and “European Union”.

Although such bibliometric research enabled a quantitative assessment of the ontological security literature, without content knowledge it would not be feasible to arrive at a comprehensive understanding using only statistical metrics. Therefore, the MAXQDA program, which helps reveal the deepening dimension of a field, was used to make a systematic literature review of examined articles. The analysis of articles in terms of the issues studied showed that Russia and Sweden were among the most studied countries, and the number of studies conducted on Turkey and Germany were also significant at the state level. It can also be concluded that while the European Union emerged as a prominent topic in ontological security studies at the international organizational level, NATO was addressed in just one article. This finding about NATO is important for those scholars looking for an under-examined topic for their future research.

Classifying articles as theoretical or case studies, the systematic literature review showed that there has been a clear tendency towards case studies, as only about 17% of the articles are theoretical. Moreover, the analysis has revealed that both theoretical and case studies on ontological security are varied, dynamic, and self-innovating. Dividing articles into three groups in terms of novelty revealed that a first group of studies was focused on an in-depth analysis of concepts including “self”, “identity”, “anxiety”, and “critical situations” to clarify key terms in ontological security. The systematic literature review also showed how a second set of articles strengthened the literature by exploring ontological security through different concepts, such as the impact of interactions in cyberspace on states or the role of global injustices as the main producers of ontological insecurity. Finally, the analysis demonstrated how a last group of articles complemented the ontological security perspective with different theories, including those of the Paris School, securitization, normative theory, realism, postcolonial theory, and feminism.

Examining articles not only in terms of their topics but also methodology revealed that ontological security studies rely primarily on discourse analysis and its variations. It can also be said that surveys, content analysis, and public polls serve as the main sources of data for the quantitative articles.

To contribute to the development of the existing literature, the findings of this article can guide future studies by identifying three gaps. First of all, considering the cooperation ties in the Euro-American understanding that dominates the discipline, it would be beneficial to establish a network of cooperation to create a strong epistemic community in ontological security studies to help guide the literature. The convergence of theoretical and regional experts through international conferences or projects would facilitate the implementation of disparate concepts in a multitude of case studies. Secondly, new studies can examine unstudied or less studied regions, such as Africa. In addition to examining states’ senses of ontological security, new studies may focus on various international and regional organizations beyond those already examined, such as NATO and the EU. Lastly, future studies may benefit from the introduction of more statistical methods to support their analyses. Quantitative content analysis, for example, enables the examination of narratives based on the frequency of word repetition through the coding of specific concepts. Additionally, while the aim of this article

was to narrow down the extensive dataset in order to facilitate a qualitative review, future bibliometric studies may overcome this limitation by conducting their research on larger databases, using quantitative methods.

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