

News Media Framing of the Anti-Austerity and Pro-“Europe” Movements During the Greek Referendum Protest Cycles

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This study aims to explore and discuss how Greek news media Twitter accounts reported and framed grassroots protest/support activities of the anti-austerity camp and the pro-“Europe” camp, and their protagonists, grievances, and demands in the days before and after the July 2015 bailout referendum. The Greek referendum offers a special case to study the protest paradigm in complex, hybrid and polarized protest arenas, where two opposing protest camps mobilize massively to achieve their political aims. In total, 1,999 media tweets with references to grassroots protest/support activities and public opinion/citizens’ behavior in relation to the referendum were analyzed using content analysis processes and framing devices. Results show significant differences in frame coverage depending on the protest cycle challenging the protest paradigm, while the media emphasis on high-profile sources confirms key features of this paradigm.

Keywords: Greek 2015 referendum, news framing, protest paradigm, protest cycles, Twitter, sourcing, content analysis

The “protest paradigm” has been identified as a dominant framework in understanding media politics of dissent (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012; Dardis, 2006; McLeod & Detenber, 1999). According to this paradigm, media often rely on specific types of frames and sources that support the status quo and delegitimize groups that challenge it by obscuring protests’ social/political concerns and by weakening the legitimacy of protests and protesters (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). However, the protest paradigm has been typically studied in the context of activities of a single protest movement against the state/government or some kind of status quo. The 2015 bailout referendum in Greece offers a special case to study the protest paradigm in more complex, hybrid and polarized protest arenas, where two opposing protest camps mobilized massively to achieve their political aims.

In particular, this article aims to explore and discuss whether, in what cases, how, and to what extent Greek news media used Twitter to portray grassroots protest/support activities of the anti-austerity camp and the newly formed pro-“Europe” camp, and their advocates, grievances, and demands in the days before and after the referendum. This is discussed in parallel with Twitter’s impact on the visibility

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and framing of social protests and the special features of the Greek protest during the austerity period. Both of these aspects are further analyzed next.

The Protest Paradigm: Main Aspects, New Challenges

The protest paradigm suggests that media tend to frame protests that threaten the status quo by marginalizing, criminalizing, and demonizing protesters, drawing attention away from their core concerns, relying heavily on official sources rather than the protesters' experiences, and amplifying violence and sensationalism (Cottle, 2008; Gorringer & Rosie, 2009). Media may undermine movement agendas by distorting their numerical strength or by undermining the causes of the protesters (worthiness) and protesters' unity, commitment, and diversity (Wouters & Walgrave, 2017).

Content analyses of American newspapers and broadcast stories have found similar status quo frames (Boyle et al., 2012; Dardis, 2006). McLeod and Detenber's (1999) study of the Right to Party movement revealed that mainstream media repeatedly used disparaging labels to describe protesters, emphasized norm violations, and focused on their clashes with police rather than issues. Scholars have described a "toolbox" of media frames that journalists use to emphasize deviance and/or downplay protesters' concerns, in addition to "violence" devices and other marginalization tools (Dardis, 2006).

However, recent studies have moved beyond the protest paradigm even in the case of traditional media. Taylor and Gunby (2016) found that negative coverage of protests may include more substantive information about a movement's demands as compared with less critical ones. Protest movements have also become more sophisticated in their protest logic and tactics to draw the attention of media and exploit traditional media framing to suit their purposes (Cammaerts, 2012).

Recent research has focused on the factors and conditions that may trigger protest or alternative media frames. As Cottle (2008) points out, as a result of changes in the media environment and in social movements, contemporary news media are "capable of exhibiting a more complex relation to the politics of protest than assumed in the past" (p. 859). Kyriakidou and Olivas Osuna (2017), discussing the coverage of Indignados protests in Greece and Spain, argue that traditional media adopted more positive angles. However, Indignados were reported as mere expressions of resentment against the status quo rather than movements offering valid political alternatives. Lee (2014) also argues that protest coverage is less negative when the protest addresses a political matter and that protest coverage has become less negative over time. Schulenberg and Chenier (2014), studying the coverage of the policing of protests at the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto, found a shift in the portrayal of the police and the protesters from one that was negative toward the protesters to one that was negative toward the police.

The choice of frames also depends on the impact of economic crises. Papaioannou (2018), focusing on the anti-austerity protests since 2008 in the European Union, argues that a factor that may have challenged the protest paradigm is the unpopularity of the austerity measures imposed on several countries. Media could no longer afford to ignore or stigmatize anti-austerity protests. Austerity also may have heightened the scarcity and precariousness of journalism jobs (Gollmitzer, 2014) and may have put pressure on journalists to reflect critically on the biases of the protest paradigm.

Another factor challenging the protest paradigm is the pressure that traditional media feel from the growing use of social media. Social media's fast and easy communication formats facilitate protest coordination, firsthand reporting, and instant assessment of the newsworthiness of events, and social media's massive use (Afouxenidis, 2014) contributes to the construction of an ambient news environment that blurs the boundaries between professional journalism and citizen engagement in news production and sharing (Hermida, 2010, 2013). Thus, while traditional media do remain important providers of symbolic meaning (Levy & Nielsen, 2010), they are not necessarily controlling protests' framing. Alternative protest coverage can be streamed via social media, enabling the circulation of counterframes (Anduiza, Cristancho & Sabucedo, 2014; Dahlgren, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Penney & Dadas, 2014). This body of research has focused on the functions of Twitter within protest scenarios in which a networked counterpublic turned to Twitter to articulate its own narrative of the events and mobilize support (Hermida, 2013).

Against this backdrop of understandings and research on the protest paradigm and its challenge from the use of social media, we need to discuss how social movements are subject to journalistic biases of selection (which protests get coverage), sourcing (sources used to talk about protests), and framing (how protests are portrayed).

The 2015 Greek Referendum in the Context of the Economic Crisis

In May 2010, Greece agreed with its creditors the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank (the so-called Troika) on a bailout economic adjustment program based on a memorandum of understanding (MoU). The debt crisis, which evolved into a full-blown recession of unprecedented depth and duration, and the political and social impact of the harsh austerity measures, privatizations, and labor market reforms introduced with the first and subsequent MoUs (e.g., Perez & Matsaganis, 2018) caused significant political ruptures and social upheaval.

The July 2015 bailout referendum needs to be understood in relation to a new socioeconomic cleavage that emerged during this period through processes of anti-austerity mobilization and the politicization of the conflicts around crisis management solutions. The reception or rejection of the MoUs was the decisive line of formation of this cleavage, which complemented and reshaped the traditional left-right cleavage in Greek politics (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, & Exadaktylos, 2014). This new dividing line was described in terms of a pro-Euro/anti-memorandum cleavage (Gerodimos & Karyotis, 2015), or of a dichotomy between pro- and anti-memorandum media adherents (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014) and political party adherents (Kountouri & Nikolaidou, 2019).

The anti-/pro-memorandum cleavage was mobilized in the voting behavior of Greeks in three national elections—two in 2012 and one in 2015—which were at least partly the result of the wider mobilization of the anti-austerity movement and waves of anti-austerity protests (Karyotis & Rüdiger, 2018). This cleavage provided the ground for major transformations to Greece's political system, starting with the "earthquake elections" of 2012. These elections resulted in the breakdown of the bipartisanism of the ruling parties PASOK and ND (a social-democratic center-left and conservative center-right party, respectively), which had signed the MoUs with Troika, and the rise of SYRIZA (the coalition of radical left),

which, based on an anti-memorandum agenda and capitalizing on its presence in protest movements (Spourdalakis, 2014), became the official opposition in the 2012 national elections and the government in 2015. In addition, these changes were reflected by the entry to parliament of Golden Dawn, an extreme neo-Nazi right-wing party supported by protest voters who wanted to punish the “corrupted” establishment and cancel the MoUs (Ellinas, 2013).

During the period 2010–2015, the anti-austerity/anti-memorandum camp was mobilized in parallel in successive waves of protests. Protest events since 2010 revealed some new elements in comparison with recent (pre-2010) episodes of mobilization (Psimitis, 2011). According to Simiti (2016), mobilization did not take the form of a social movement sharing a collective identity because protesters were largely heterogeneous socially and politically. The agenda of this movement was a mix of demands for significant systemic change, a variety of grievances—mainly about increasing socioeconomic inequalities and considerable income loss and joblessness faced by a widening segment of households—and rage against the “old” and “corrupted” elites (Simiti, 2016).

Along with traditional (organization-based) marches and demonstrations by trade unions and interest groups (Diani & Kousis, 2014), new forms of political mobilization appeared. Examples of grassroots mobilization against austerity were participation in the concentrations by the so-called *Aganaktismenoi* (Indignants) at Syntagma Square, in popular assemblies in Syntagma Square or in neighborhoods, in forms of political disobedience and acts of resistance (Pautz & Kominou, 2013), and in solidarity activities (Theocharis, 2015).

From January to June 2015, the new government, elected on a pledge to put an end to austerity, followed an aggressive strategy in bailout negotiations with Troika. On June 27, 2015, after six months of turbulent negotiations, the Greek prime minister (PM) announced that Greece would hold a referendum on Troika’s latest bailout conditions. The citizens were asked to vote either No or Yes on the draft agreement submitted by Troika. With the announcement of the referendum, the European Central Bank limited the quantity of euros that it would provide to Greek banks, and capital controls were imposed. A week later, Greeks voted by landslide No (61%), rejecting Troika’s conditions.

The 2015 Bailout Referendum as a Hybrid and Polarized Protest Arena of Two Massive Protest Camps

The 2015 referendum summarized some of the key characteristics of the political and social polarization generated since 2010. During the referendum, the anti-/pro-memorandum cleavage line was reflected in the Yes/No camps.

The Yes/No campaigns developed their rhetoric on the basis of a politics of fear and a politics of hope (Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2017) and were characterized by a mixture of grassroots protest/support activities involving a variety of campaigners, from news media and political parties to grassroots actors and “high-profile” supporters participating in grassroots activities.

The main stream of the No camp believed that a No win would lead Troika's hardliners to concessions. A minor stream was in favor of a halt in negotiations with Troika. The No camp was socially backed mainly by poorer segments of Greek society, small business owners, young people, public sector employees, pensioners, farmers, and lower middle-class strata that were hit hard by austerity (Georgiadou & Kafe, 2018). Apart from "No," the other main slogans of this camp were "No to austerity" and "No to blackmail." The No campaign was politically supported by political actors of wildly different ideological orientations. They ranged from the radical left governing party of SYRIZA and other leftist parties and groups to ANEL—SYRIZA's right leaning government partner—and even Golden Dawn (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016).

The Yes camp had no deep roots in the anti-austerity movement and was backed by a pro-Europe protest movement that was formed during the referendum. Its supporters collectively mobilized in a mix of grassroots protest activities against the new Greek PM's negotiation tactics with Troika. This camp demanded that the government accept Troika's bailout conditions because there was no other realistic alternative to avoid a disorderly default and a Grexit. Market-friendly reforms and cuts in public spending were seen as absolutely necessary to manage the crisis. The pro-Europe camp was socially backed predominantly by affluent citizens and the upper/middle class (Georgiadou & Kafe, 2018). Its main slogans were "Yes" (meaning vote Yes on Troika's draft agreement) and "Stay in Europe and in euro." The center/right opposition parties, ND and PASOK (which, when in government, signed the MoUs with Troika), and the newly formed POTAMI, as well as several EU officials, backed the Yes camp.

Most mainstream media in Greece explicitly took sides in the referendum, arguing against the legitimacy of the referendum, questioning the government's ability to handle the crisis, and undermining the effectiveness of a possible no victory (e.g., see Triga & Manavopoulos, 2017). Mainstream commercial nationwide media organizations, with their TV, radio, and newspaper branches, predominantly campaigned for Yes, whereas mainstream left-leaning media fought for the No camp, employing a frame of injustice, calling on people to resist austerity, and pointing out that the creditors disrespected the elected government and the right of the people to decide on their future (Triga & Manavopoulos, 2017).

The Three Cycles of Protest During the 2015 Referendum

During this period, we may discern three cycles of protest. The first cycle includes the announcement of the referendum. The pro-Europe movement was against the referendum per se, arguing that it was unconstitutional and potentially catastrophic because it widened the rift between Greece and its creditors. In contrast, the anti-austerity movement was strongly pro-referendum, believing that it offered Greeks a rare opportunity to express their views to Troika.

The second cycle of protest (overlapping with the first) is the referendum campaign per se. In this cycle, both movements tried to mobilize their supporters in protests/support activities and to persuade citizens to vote Yes or No on the referendum question (or cast a blank ballot signifying "none agreement"). Essentially, this cycle was concluded with the landslide No victory.

The third cycle of protest took place in the week or so after the referendum. It was characterized by the government's acceptance of Troika's conditions. During this period, the pro-Europe movement demanded that the government disregard the victory of No, while the anti-austerity movement was euphoric, but also shocked by the first signs of the government's turn and organized new protests hoping to avert it.

Research Questions

Overall, the referendum was a hybrid case of massive protest action by two opposing protest camps that used a variety of different protest logic tactics in a campaign involving political parties, grassroots movements, and the media as active campaigners.

Our research focuses on the portrayal of grassroots protest/support activities, the grassroots protagonists, and the frames used in Twitter posts by Greek media from June 27, 2015, when the referendum was announced, to a week after the referendum. The questions we attempt to answer are the following:

RQ1: How did media cover grassroots protest/support activities during the period leading up to the referendum? More specifically, how did they cover the activities' protagonists, their grievances, and their demands in a hybrid and polarized context in which people participated massively, regarding them as legitimate forms of political expression?

RQ2: How did the media frame protests, and how are these frames related to different movement strategies expressed in and across different protest cycles?

Method

A list of 50 Twitter accounts was compiled that comprised all mainstream nationwide news broadcasters and newspapers as well as mainstream online-only news portals. All tweets posted by the media on the list between June 26 and July 15, 2015, with the hashtag #referendum and similar ones (e.g., #no, #yes, #MenoumeEvropi) were collected using Twitter's streaming API. Through this process, we were able to collect 12,634 media tweets.

On the basis of this collection, we focused exclusively in the identification of those media tweets that made direct references to (a) referendum-related grassroots protest/support activities and (b) public opinion and citizens' activities in relation to the referendum. Of the 12,634 referendum-related media tweets of our collection, 1,999 (15.8%) had direct references to the mentioned activities and were singled out for analysis.

Tweet coding was based on a mix of inductive and deductive qualitative and quantitative content analysis processes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Making sense of the kinds of grassroots protest/support activities that the 1,999 media tweets in our data set were talking about was our first concern. This phase, inspired by grounded theory techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), was based initially on free coding of

protest/support categories and, later on, the organization of these categories in higher order headings. The unit of analysis was the tweet message, including text, images, and videos. It was essential to take into account the tweet as a whole and not just its textual content because, as we found out, it was a common media practice with Twitter to just post an image or a video with a hashtag, but no further comments. Through this process, we were able to abstract three main categories of grassroots protest/support activities mentioned in media tweets: (a) street-level conventional and peaceful, (b) street level involving disruption, unrest, tension, or violence, and (c) indoor/desktop-level activities.

Media tweets on street-level conventional and peaceful protest/support activities during the referendum included 10 distinct subcategories (see Table 1).

Table 1. Street-Level Conventional and Peaceful Protest/Support Activities.

Subcategory	Tweet Examples (Greek translations)
Mass demonstrations—marches/rallies	Pro-No rally on Monday and “Stay in Europe” on Tuesday.
Banners/ flags/posters	The banners of the pro-Yes rally.
Speech making in rallies	Tsipra’s speech on Syntagma Square, live now!
Music events	Malamas sings for No in Syntagma Square.
Formal meetings/discussions (groups of people or members of formal associations/unions)	Meeting of municipalities of Greece on the referendum.
Strikes/formal union-related activities	Strike rallies in Athens.
Celebrations	Democracy celebrates in Athens center.
Uncoordinated spontaneous activities	German tourist with a Greek flag and No on his car.
Symbolic referendums (by international Yes/No supporters)	A possible symbolic referendum in Italy, an initiative of the left.
Kiosks	Kiosk for No.

A second major category of street-level grassroots protest/support activities referenced by the media comprised activities involving some kind of public disturbance (see Table 2).

Table 2. Street-Level Protest/Support Activities Involving Disruption, Unrest, Tension, or Violence.

Subcategory	Tweet Examples
Planned peaceful disruptive actions by small groups of protesters/supporters	SYRIZA youth members tried to hang a banner on the Acropolis.
Unplanned and uncoordinated peaceful street-level disruptive activity by anonymous protesters	An episode between the Metropolitan Anthimos and citizens on the background of the referendum.
Quarrels (nonviolent, between supporters of Yes and No)	Unprecedented tension within the Athens Bar Association on the referendum.
Street-level violent incidents (supporters of Yes or No)	"No" supporters burned the EU flag.

A third category of activities included what we call "indoor/desktop" protest/support activities. Such activities took place mostly in "closed" spaces (e.g., offices and courtrooms, homes, TV and radio studios, and Internet cafes). In such activities, movement is a nonsignificant aspect of the protest/support (see Table 3).

Table 3. Indoor/Desktop-Level Protest/Support Activities.

Subcategory	Tweet Examples
Statements (by individuals or permanent groups)	Anonymous to Greeks: all shout loudly together "No"
Signature collection	A letter of solidarity from 400 Italian researchers . . .
Petitions (texts signed by protesters/supporters)	Pan-European resolution: no austerity . . .
Legal actions by Yes or No supporters.	Appeal to the Hellenic Council of State . . .
Social media campaigning	Dynamic movement in Facebook: "we take responsibility to support 'Yes'"
Cartoons/drawings/ memes	Arkas's cartoon . . .
Fund-raising	2015 Referendum: UK citizen raised € 1.3 million for Greece
Opinion polls	In favor of democracy and . . . #oxi # . . . 65% of French people
Letters	A moving letter by a teacher . . .

The mentioned inductive typology of protest/support activities in the context of the 2015 Greek referendum shares some protest activity categories with Ratliff and Hall's (2014) typology, which was developed with the United States context in mind. However, the latter typology does not make the distinction between street-level and indoor/desktop protest activities, which is important given that movements today rely heavily on the use of online platforms to protest, mobilize citizens, and gain support.

On a second round of coding, we were able to identify 12 categories of protagonists in the protest/support activities mentioned in the 1,999 media tweets of our data set (see Table 4).

Table 4. Categories of Protagonists (in Greece or Abroad) in Grassroots Protest/Support Activities.

Subcategory	Tweet Examples
Demonstrators	Solidarity rally tomorrow in Paris.
Prominent people (e.g., TV stars, university professors)	Kosta Gavras: Courage, tomorrow things will be different.
Economic interest group (e.g., labor union, employers association)	Pro-Yes decided the Athens Bar Association.
Ad hoc group (Informal and short-lived group of people engaged in actions in favor of the Yes or No camp)	Declaration by 85 personalities in favor of Yes.
Cause group (permanent group promoting specific cause)	Anonymous: we support the Greeks who said "No" – the banks and the institutions raped a country with long history.
Unconventional protesters (in actions not approved by authorities)	Activists disrupted Merkel's speech in Berlin: they were holding "No" banners.
Ordinary citizens (not in the context of organized protest activities)	Heartbreaking letter by a 21-year-old to FT: the referendum threatens my future.
Political party group	Solidarity rally today in Madrid organized by Podemos.
Political party leaders	Tsipras's speech in Syntagma Square
Leaders or prominent supporters of the Yes movement	"Yes" committee: yes to Greece, yes to Euro
Unidentified individuals	Hood-wearing individuals broke up a pre-election "Yes" kiosk in Maroussi.
Others	Athens municipality employees removed "No" posters but not "Yes" ones.

Regarding RQ2 on how Greek media framed grassroots protest/support activities and their protagonists, grievances, and demands, we understood framing as a building process referring to dynamic meaning construction (Snow & Benford, 2000), through the interplay of different textual and audio/visual elements present in a tweet as the main unit of analysis. Paraphrasing Gamson and Modigliani (1989), in the context of this study, we suggest that protest frames can be viewed as central organizing ideas or storylines that provided meaning to the grassroots protest/support activities of the anti-austerity and the pro-Europe camps. Based on an inductive analysis of the media tweets in our data set, protest frames were mainly extracted through some positive and negative framing indicators. The media used these indicators in their tweets mainly by (a) paraphrasing or quoting the protest/support protagonists (i.e., relying on catchphrases, slogans, images, memes, animations, cartoons, etc.), (b) posting information/estimations that were (un)favorable to one of the Yes/No camps (e.g., opinion poll results, statistics, and estimations about the impact of a No or Yes win), and (c) using their own opinion wording, metaphors, etc., to describe a camp and its aims, activities, motives, popularity, and so on.

Frames were first generated by a qualitative analysis of tweets texts and then coded as holistic variables in a manual content analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). For instance, we conducted an in-depth analysis of tweets in the first step to generate four frames.

The protest frame indicators positively defined were *grievances and demands* (e.g., "No to the measures of the creditors"), *high symbolic significance of the movement's aims* (e.g., "A 'Yes' will give hope to our children"), *spectacle* (e.g., "Rachel Makri [a SYRIZA parliamentarian] paints banners in favor of No"), *favorable comparisons* and *favorable predictions* (e.g., "Deutsche Welle: the 'No' demonstration was much bigger than the 'Yes' one"), *international solidarity* and *identifications with prestigious groups* (e.g., "France: a big demonstration in favor of 'No' and against austerity"), and *popularity and credibility* (e.g., "From 20,000 to 25,000 citizens gathered in Syntagma Square. We stay in Europe with 'Yes'").

However, in this study, we were equally interested in their negative counterparts because they could provide evidence on the application of the protest paradigm (e.g., triviality or dangerousness of a movement's aims, absence of references to a movement's grievances and demands, unfavorable comparisons and predictions, low popularity, absence of international solidarity, lack of commitment and unity, lack of credibility and trust, and identification of a movement with individuals or groups with a questionable background or motives). Last, we need to cite neutral framing devices that appear during the post-referendum protest cycle: when a tweet has a purely informative role regarding the actions in which protesters are engaged. In that case, journalists did not paraphrase or quote the protest/support protagonists and did not post (un)favorable information or use their opinion to describe a camp.

The mentioned framing indicators were consequently used to identify four master frames that have been discussed in the literature on social movement framing (Snow, 2013). On this basis, we applied a frame analysis approach that follows Boykoff and Laschever (2011) in emphasizing the frame content in relation not only to the news media, but also to their significance as instruments of movement self-representation. Based on this, we were able to identify the following frames.

The *legitimizing frame* refers to the reference system of the protest. It is the descriptive context in which the referendum and the Yes/No campaigns acquire their legitimating contours and features. The positive framing devices described earlier, such as credibility, popularity, and international solidarity, were extracted to support the legitimating frame.

The *identity frame* specifies the grievances of the protesters and helps the identification of the “us” and the “them” (Johnston & Noakes, 2005) and offers legitimacy. In this frame, we indexed the positive framing device grievances and demands, quoting also with the use of images/videos or paraphrasing the grievances and demands made by the Yes/No camps.

The *consequences frame* emphasizes the manner in which the referendum issue will affect people (Dirikx & Gelders, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). All the negative framing devices showing the ethical, institutional, political, and economic consequences of the referendum were indexed in the consequence frame.

The *injustice frame* provides a shared understanding of “what’s going on” as a mode of interpretation of those who define the action of an authority as an injustice (Gamson, Fireman, & Rytina, 1982; see also Snow & Benford, 2000).

Findings

Overall, more than half of the media tweets (53.1%) referred to indoor/desktop protest/support activities. Almost one third of their tweets were about statements by individuals (see Table 6). Among the first five most mentioned activities, four were indoor/desktop ones. Media appeared to be less enthusiastic regarding tweeting street-level activities. Interestingly, street-level activities involving disruption, unrest, tension, or violence did not really get much media attention on Twitter (a mere 5.9% of all media tweets). This is one indication that a protest paradigm tactic—which overreports violent incidents, thus stigmatizing protesters and their causes—was not widely adopted in media reporting of the Greek 2015 referendum grassroots activities. However, other journalistic norms were at play that could effectively marginalize the voices of citizens participating in protest movements.

Table 6. Most Frequently Mentioned Types of Grassroots Activities in Media Tweets.

Subcategories [main categories]	<i>N</i>	%
Statements [Indoor/desktop]	589	29.5
Demonstrations [Street-level, peaceful]	64	28.2
Opinion polls [Indoor/desktop]	80	9.0
Signatures [Indoor/desktop]	18	5.9
Legal action [Indoor/desktop]	16	5.8

The protagonists who made the statements reported by media in their tweets (see Table 6) were predominantly "prominent people" (63.3%) and "economic interest groups" (17.5%). This finding strongly suggests the adoption of a traditional journalistic hierarchy of sources\actors. This is further supported by the emphasis placed on opinion polls. Media references to signature collections were also protest/support acts mainly by prominent people. Finally, a legal action case challenging the constitutional basis of the referendum by just two citizens attracted comparatively high media attention (5.8%). This finding further indicates the workings of norms regarding a journalistic hierarchy of sources and actors because the case involved a highly respected institution, the Hellenic Council of State, the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece.

Even in the reporting of the massive peaceful demonstrations, the focus was not exclusively on "anonymous" demonstrators as protagonists. Characteristically, in only 74.6% of media tweets on demonstrations, the protagonists were the demonstrators themselves. In more than 20% of media tweets on peaceful demonstrations, the emphasis was placed on the actions of political party groups within demonstrations and the participation of top-level politicians. Political party groups were commonly portrayed as the central organizers of protest/support activities even if the Yes/No campaigns and the protest movements backing them were crossing party boundaries and had actually led to the destruction of precrisis party alignments.

Furthermore, 10% of media tweets on all peaceful demonstrations were devoted to the participation of top-level politicians. It is characteristic that among the 126 media tweets exclusively about the central No rally/music event in Syntagma Square in Athens, 44.5% were about the party officials present (including PM Tsipras, who made a short speech), and only 41.5% were about the thousands of people who participated. This finding raises the question about the role of the participation of party leaders and government officials (not just prominent people recruited by protest movements) in demonstrations/rallies in how the media cover such grassroots events. The same day that PM Tsipras made his short speech in Syntagma Square, the most symbolic place of anti-austerity protests since 2010, the Yes campaign was holding its own central event in Panathenaic Stadium (a place of historic but not political significance), less than a mile away. No party leader was invited as a speaker there. The media posted just 48 tweets exclusively on the event, the vast majority of them (83.3%) focusing on the anonymous demonstrators. Thus, the central events of the Yes and No campaigns that peacefully took place on the same day less than a mile apart received significantly unequal media attention on Twitter; furthermore, the protagonists appeared to be very different: Tsipras at the No event and the demonstrators at the Yes event.

Examining media focus on protagonists in grassroots protest/support activities during the referendum, the balance in terms of media hierarchies of sources and news protagonists becomes clearer. As shown in Table 7, in their tweets referring to grassroots protest/support activities, the media paid more attention to traditionally privileged actors as compared with grassroots ones.

Table 7. Share of Usually Nonprivileged and Privileged News Sources and Protagonists.

Usually nonprivileged news sources/protagonists	<i>N</i>	%	Traditionally valued news sources/protagonists	<i>n</i>	%
Demonstrators	481	24.1	Prominent people	423	21.2
Ad hoc group	251	12.6	Economic interest group	225	11.3
Cause group	48	2.4	Political party group	102	5.1
Unconventional protesters	48	2.4	Political party leader	83	4.2
Unidentified individuals	4	0.2	Leaders or prominent supporters of the Yes camp	38	1.9
Total	832	41.6	Total	871	43.6

It is also interesting that citizens who did not participate in collective grassroots protest/support activities received a reasonable amount of media attention on Twitter (14.3%). However, their individual voices were rarely quoted. Characteristically, in the 286 media tweets that focused on noncollectively campaigning citizens, only 10.8% mentioned their views. Their predominant portrayal was that of a faceless “public opinion” in opinion polls (62.6%). Finally, 8.7% were portrayed as panicked nobodies who queued at ATMs and gas stations because of the imposed capital controls. Overall, noncollectively campaigning citizens or noncampaigning ones were backstage from the action—a pretty common image in media portrayals.

Framing Protest/Support Activities

The analysis that follows is focused on the three protest cycles of the referendum: The first cycle was focused on the Yes referendum or No referendum issue, the second on the campaign, and the third on the post-referendum protests.

Protest Cycle A: On the Decision to Hold a Referendum

This cycle was relevant to some basic political assumptions of the anti-austerity and the pro-Europe camps in Greece. In this protest cycle, the two camps defined the problem and its main characteristics; the news media focused on the decision to hold the referendum in 309 of their tweets (15.5% of total).

Negative referendum framing was identified in 134 (43.4%) of the media tweets. The most common framing devices were photos with scenes of despair and panic—people queueing at ATMs and gas stations (17.9%)—and emotional catchphrases stressing fears that the referendum would further divide an already polarized society (11.2%). Negative frame building relied heavily on scenarios regarding the consequences of the referendum: imagery of imminent ethical, institutional, and economic catastrophe awaiting Greece from its decision to hold a referendum. Overall, such framing delegitimized in a very aggressive manner the government’s decision and legitimized the rhetoric of the pro-Europe movement.

Practically, the consequences frame of imminent catastrophe validated the pro-Europe movement's claim that the only viable option for Greece was to accept Troika's conditions.

Positive referendum framing was far less popular among media tweets (17.1%). Interestingly, positive frame building was predominantly based on a legitimating frame that focused on an opinion poll in Germany, according to which "60% of Germans are in favor of the Greek referendum." This information appeared in 62% of the positive media tweets on the government's decision to hold a referendum. In short, pro-referendum frame building pointed to the favorable opinion of the German people to justify the legitimacy of the anti-austerity movement's claim that it is the people who should decide on austerity—not the banks or the democratically unaccountable Troika.

Protest Cycle B: The Referendum Campaign

The referendum campaign attracted the majority of news media posts ($n = 1,508$, 75.4%). The news media coverage can be broken down into events that took place in Greece and abroad and, similarly, into protagonists/sources living in Greece or abroad.

Framing Pro-No/Yes International Grassroots Solidarity

The vast majority of the 188 media tweets referring to a range of solidarity activities organized abroad were supportive to the No camp and the anti-austerity movement (88.3%). The frame indicator of international solidarity to the anti-austerity movement and its No campaign was manifested in media tweets reporting on international street-level peaceful events (e.g., "#london: solidarity rally for Greece"), endorsement statements (e.g., "Paolo Coelho: no to austerity, yes to democracy"), signatures collection (e.g., "solidarity letter by 400 Italian researchers"), online petitioning (e.g., "Pan-European resolution: no austerity"), and fund-raising (e.g., "€ 1.3 million raised by a British for Greece"). The international solidarity indicator offered legitimacy to the No camp: saying "no" to Greece's creditors' demands was justified because it had the active support of citizens and prominent people around the world.

International pro-Yes activities were few and did not have any of the vitality of the international solidarity of the pro-No international campaign. Of the 16 media tweets, nine quoted a statement made by Daniel Cohn Bendit, and another four were about a demonstration organized by Yes supporters in Brussels. This finding suggests that international grassroots solidarity activities were effective in challenging the protest paradigm on Greek media coverage of the domestic anti-austerity movement and its pro-No campaign.

Framing the Pro-No/Yes Campaigns in Greece

During the referendum campaign (June 27 to July 6, 2015), the media posted 1,320 tweets on grassroots events and their protagonists in Greece. The analysis of the pro-Yes campaign is based on 518 tweets, which included neutral (46.4%) or positive media tweets (35.1%) about Yes activities, protagonists, and grievances, and negative tweets (18.5%) about the No campaign. Similarly, the analysis

of the pro-No campaign is based on 651 tweets, which included neutral (38.3%) or positive (52%) tweets on No and negative on Yes (9.7%).

The Yes Campaign in Media Tweets

The Yes campaign, as portrayed in media tweets, attempted to identify itself with "Europe" as a symbolic land of economic prosperity, security, freedom, and democracy. This offered legitimacy to the pro-Europe movement's purpose and actions. "Europe" appeared in 20% of the positive/neutral Yes media tweets, and the overarching media frame of the Yes campaign was "Stay in Europe." The pro-Yes supporters fought to keep Greece in this symbolic place, whereas the No supporters (among them the government) and the anti-austerity movement were those who, with their (populist) actions and beliefs, threatened Greece's position. This media frame further provided the grounds for identity construction and action to achieve political change.

Europe framing was based mostly on media tweets quoting or paraphrasing statements made by pro-Yes intellectuals and prominent Yes campaigners. Others among the pro-Yes camp, particularly economic interest groups, were more political in their framing of the campaign. This time, "Europe" was replaced by the "European Union." The EU as political goal did not explicitly share any of the symbolic virtues of Europe. No positive identity framing was really attempted. The rewards of achieving this political goal were stated in punishment-avoidance terms.

The protagonists in the 418 positive/neutral Yes media tweets were mostly demonstrators (26.3%), prominent people (24.2%), economic interest groups (15.8%), and ad hoc groups (16%). Demonstrations and other protest/support activities by pro-Yes campaigners were mostly covered positively. The vast majority of tweets (85%) were limited only to the two central pro-Yes rallies in Athens, and another 10% were devoted to a rally in Greece's second largest city, Thessaloniki, privileging events happening in the center of political action.

Pro-Yes media tweets also attempted to frame negatively the No camp (18.5% of the Yes campaign tweets). Negative framing of the opponents was mainly based on the consequences frame of imminent catastrophe (e.g., Greece would soon become "Enver Hoxha's Albania," "Turkey's satellite," or like a "poor African country"). The No campaign also attracted negative media attention on peacefully disruptive or violent incidents involving No protesters/supporters (44.2% of all negative No tweets). Thus, the imminent catastrophe media frame was somehow further validated by the tendency of No protesters/supporters to engage in civil disobedience and even violence. This pantheon of terrors also included media mentions of highly controversial No supporters, such as an imprisoned member of a terrorist group and a political friend of the extreme-right Golden Dawn party leadership.

The No Campaign in Media Tweets

The pro-No campaign, as covered by media tweets, was focused on the identification of its supporters around terms such as *national sovereignty* and *democracy*. The dominant configuration frame was based on the main claim that Greece's problem was a political one, not an economic one; no

pro-No media tweet mentioned Greece's debt or lack of liquidity as a financial problem. It was political because its creditors had used methods that were undemocratic and led Greece to loss of national sovereignty.

The identity frame in pro-No media tweets was, rather, an injustice frame constructed through framing devices such as (a) textual or visual references to slogans in demonstrations, posters, banners, speeches, or statements (e.g., "no to austerity," "no to dependence," "no more humiliation," "no blackmail," "no to terror"), and (b) textual or visual references to large numbers of committed and united No protesters/supporters (e.g., "hundreds of signatures to defend 'No,'" "350,000 people in 'No' rally") fighting for higher aims (e.g., "No means dignity, democracy, life").

The protagonists in the 588 positive/neutral No news media tweets were predominantly demonstrators (28.1%), prominent people (22.1%), and citizens (12.6%). The pro-No campaign, as opposed to the Yes campaign, appeared in media tweets on a wide range of events, from several mass demonstrations, to banners hanging on buildings and monuments, to music events and individual protest action. Most of this street-level action mentioned in media tweets was peaceful (48.5% of the positive/neutral No tweets). Unlike pro-Yes protesters/supporters, the pro-No ones did not hesitate to engage in street-level action with the purpose of disrupting and creating tension in peaceful ways (6% of tweets). Such activity, however, was mostly framed by the media as No campaigners' lack of respect for the rule of law. Pro-No media tweets, in turn, framed the Yes camp negatively, exploiting a number of incidents that were presented as unethical. These two findings indicate that the protest paradigm was selectively applied in protest action that is perceived as violating the social norms of lawful and ethical protest behavior.

Protest Cycle C: The Post-Referendum Protest Cycle

The week or so after the No triumph (July 7–15, 2015) was marked by the government's decision to actually accept Troika's conditions. Within this period, organized demonstrations and rallies took place in Athens and several cities around Greece. The anti-austerity movement was urging the government to capitalize on the No victory and put the pressure on Troika to take back a good portion of the austerity measures. On the other hand, the pro-Europe movement was demonstrating to pressure the government to reach an agreement with Troika. However, as compared with the pre-referendum week, media attention to these movements and their grassroots activity dropped dramatically. Just 182 tweets were posted by the media during the whole post-referendum period. This represented a mere 9.1% of the total number of tweets under study. The post-referendum No rally of July 10 in Syntagma Square in Athens was mentioned in only 33 news media tweets, whereas the pre-referendum No rally at the same square seven days earlier was mentioned in 129 tweets. The Yes rally of July 10 in Syntagma Square was mentioned in just 26 tweets, whereas the Yes rally of June 30 was mentioned in 65 tweets.

In parallel, there was a change in the framing of these events in media tweets. In the post-referendum period, 73.4% of media tweets on peaceful street-level grassroots activities did not use a negative or positive framing tone; in comparison, only 47.4% of the pre-referendum period activities were described neutrally. Apparently, soon after the referendum, the media collectively assessed that the anti-

austerity and the pro-Europe movements had exhausted their dynamic to influence the negotiation processes between Greece and its creditors; hence, their actions were practically not newsworthy.

Conclusions

This study focused on how 50 Greek news media Twitter accounts covered grassroots protest/support activities and their protagonists, grievances, and demands in the context of the 2015 Greek bailout referendum. The analysis revealed that several features of the referendum as a protest arena, its hybrid nature, the highly polarized and mobilized Yes/No campaigns, and the referendum's cycles of protest challenged the protest paradigm. However, a certain number of selection and definition biases persisted, confirming key characteristics of the protest paradigm.

Important components of the protest paradigm—specifically, marginalization and demonization of the protesters and overreporting of violent incidents—were not applied in any significant way by news media covering the Greek referendum. Indoor/desktop-level protest/support activities and peaceful demonstrations/rallies provided the most vivid portrayals of the Greek referendum. Thus, in the already traditional debate of the protest paradigm, the Greek referendum can be considered an example of positive configuration and identification of two camps fighting each other to achieve their own goals. However, although our findings offer support to the argument that media coverage of protests has, overall, become less negative (e.g., Lee, 2014), the media, depending on the protest cycle, did not refrain from (re)producing highly negative overarching frames—perhaps because they became active campaigners in the highly polarized protest arena of the referendum. This finding possibly indicates that in massive and highly polarized protest contexts, when media become active campaigners, they engage in a mix of framing strategies that predominantly portray positively their camp and, to a lesser extent, stigmatize the opponent's movement.

Furthermore, a certain number of selection and definition biases were identified. The media tended to rely heavily on traditionally privileged sources even when covering grassroots activities on Twitter. The journalistic norms appeared to be at play and effectively marginalized the voices of citizens. These served as a kind of "justification background" to arguments mostly voiced by prominent supporters of the Yes and No camps. This finding points to the traditional journalistic hierarchy of sources\actors even in framing our understandings of grassroots activities, and it confirms Bennett's (1990) view that journalists "index" their stances to the elite debates.

Theoretically, the findings highlight the need to further study media protest coverage in hybrid and polarized contexts as the result of interactions among political elites, movements, and media as strategic campaigners. Our case shows that the media respond to the frames privileged by movements and political elites when there are some powerful resonance alliances between actors and frames. The consequences frame of the imminent catastrophe dominated during the first protest cycle of the configuration of the referendum. During the second protest cycle, media generated positive identity framing of the international and national grassroots activities. Privileged sources, but also massive demonstrations, amplified strong positive identity and legitimating framing components such as international solidarity, Europe, and injustice. However, in the third cycle of the post-referendum

protests, when the government was preparing to accept Troika's conditions, the media fundamentally altered their attention and framing; this finding indicates that their interests were oriented more toward the political elites and less toward the anti-austerity and pro-Europe movements. In short, the hybrid nature of the referendum, the mixture of grassroots activities and privileged voices, the media's part as active campaigners, and the multiplicity of protest tactics by two opposing movements offer a case for reconsidering the complex role played by the media in the coverage of protests.

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