

## Comparing Online Alternative and Mainstream Media in Turkey: Coverage of the TEKEL Workers Protest Against Privatization

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Challenging the dominance of mainstream media, this study questions the role of alternative news media in Turkey based on the approach that positions alternative media as an alternative to mainstream media. Quantitative content analysis is carried out with a particular focus on the antiprivatization protest by workers of the Tobacco, Tobacco Products, Salt and Alcohol Enterprises (TEKEL). It has been found that alternative media showed support for TEKEL workers by employing a tone in favor of the protesters. However, evidence from the research indicates that the depiction of the TEKEL workers protest by alternative media, to a large extent, relies on mainstream framing practices.

*Keywords: alternative news media, agenda setting, framing, TEKEL workers protest, Turkey*

### Introduction

Ideologies tend to compose their own histories. Daily production routines of the mass media are significant samples in which ideological tendencies can be observed. Because each media outlet makes its own version of the news regarding its editorial policies, various compositions representing different ideologies occur simultaneously. The way we remember and make sense of past events depends very much on how they were constructed in newsrooms. For that reason, it is important to evaluate events of the past, considering their relation to media and public memory when thinking about the *extent to which* and *how* they were covered by media organizations.

The media are our connection between the lived and the represented (Cardoso, 2006). The quality of this connection is defined according to political, economic, and sociocultural agents. Most of the time, media plan their uniform outputs under the pressure of those agents. According to Toffler (1980), the mass media themselves have become a giant loudspeaker, and their power is used across regional, ethnic, tribal, and linguistic lines to standardize the images flowing in society's mind-stream. This praxis also externalizes the basic agents that mobilize the societies as media present the facts according to their editorial policies, omitting certain groundings. In some cases, common issues of the society are restructured to address only the stakeholders, pacifying other relevant actors. However, the press, as we know it, protects public interest and justifies itself in its name (Munson & Warren, 1997).

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Date submitted: 2014-11-05

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In fact, whenever mainstream media choose not to represent important facets of social and political reality, alternative media flourish (Downing, 1995) to raise public awareness. The significance of alternative media not only comes from the consolidation of freedom of information; they are also important for revealing often-ignored aspects of an issue and for representing oppressed individuals and groups. Whereas the mainstream has a tendency to privilege the powerful, alternative media set out to privilege the powerless and the marginal; to offer a perspective "from below" and to say the "unspoken" (Harcup, 2003, p. 371). In this context, alternative media have a significant role in promoting pluralism by providing opportunities to the repressed to be heard.

Addressing the question "How do media interpret and present political issues and events?" (Noakes & Johnston, 2005, p. 4), this study conducts a comparative analysis of alternative and mainstream media in Turkey to reveal the characteristics of the nonmainstream media at the content level. Based on previous attempts to position alternative media, this study is structured around agenda-setting theory and framing to observe how effectively nonmainstream media fulfill the needs of being "alternative."<sup>1</sup> News content provided online by alternative and mainstream organizations is compared in this research. Sample mainstream media are positioned vis-à-vis alternative media serving as variables to provide insight into the overall picture of news media in Turkey. Framing analysis is used to understand the media's approach to the protest by workers at the Tobacco, Tobacco Products, Salt and Alcohol Enterprises (TEKEL). This case was chosen because it seems distinctly odd that the framing activities of social movements' *own* media, whether internally or externally directed or both, are so comprehensively off the map (Downing, 2008). Considering the significance of social movements in framing research, similarities and dissimilarities in the framing practices of TEKEL resistance are analyzed as a part of this study.

### **Sifting Through Alternative Media**

Alternative media can be defined as the media forms that are on a smaller scale, more accessible and participatory, and less constrained by bureaucracy or commercial interests than the mainstream media—and often in some way in explicit opposition to them (Dowmunt & Coyer, 2007). In adopting a horizontal approach to organization, alternative media tend to empower the means for dialogue and are usually financed by noncommercial sources. Alternative media tend to adopt communitarian characteristics that result from their local linkages. Yet alternative formations and projects that produce radical content by opposing the hegemonic discourses are largely ephemeral and limited in their capabilities. Even if alternative media are defined as the media of the minorities and the oppressed, fundamentally they cover a broad range of issues that relate to the public in general. From this aspect,

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<sup>1</sup> Several concepts in alternative media literature—such as *radical media*, *citizens' media*, *community media*, and *social movement media*—are used to refer to nonmainstream media. The term *alternative* was employed in this study, because the research is based on the methodological grounds that take alternative media as an alternative to mainstream media.

not only are feminist, ecological, or labor movements covered by alternative media, but more mundane issues are framed with diverse approaches.

The concept of alternative media incorporates all nonmainstream practices in an extended context. The qualities that differentiate alternative media from mainstream media are political ideologies that shape the way news is made. Although alternative media practices that express no political tendencies are positioned within the alternative context, the prominent component is their partisan character. What, therefore, appears as bias and the absence of balance in the alternative media is to be considered not only as a set of absolute truths; it comprises a set of accounts told from different perspectives (Atton, 2004). Lack of interest in balanced reporting makes alternative media inherently different from mainstream media, which claim to conduct objective reporting.

According to Downing, Ford, Genève, and Stein (2001), social movements represent one of the primary fields in which the radical media can be observed. Movements also are significant for the understanding of opposing cultures. Movements promote the propagation of radical media, which in return trigger movements, and in certain cases steer their evolvement. The relation between movements and radical media is not one of base and superstructure but of dialectical and, indeed, acute interdependence (Downing et al., 2001). In this sense, it is simple to position radical media regarding a social movement; it is likely that radical media will emerge within a definite movement and expire simultaneously with the end of the movement.

The media are not just a realm of symbolic power but also material and symbolic spaces where structures and contradictions of economic, political, coercive, and symbolic power manifest themselves (Fuchs, 2013). Alternative media, however, act as a form of subaltern public sphere hosting voices that are not necessarily represented in the mainstream news media. They have a significant role for introducing new ways through which people can find others who are *other* like them (Jordan, 2002). The alternative public sphere, where power relations are criticized, encourages resistance and sets the conditions that foster social movements. Moreover, the power of the subaltern to resist in the alternative public sphere is not limited to alignments behind predesigned political agendas (Rodríguez, 2011), because alternative and critical public spheres emerge in spite of dominant power relations, not because of them (Roberts, 2014).

Much effort has been put forth in theorizing alternative media, but two theories in particular can be highlighted with respect to the scope of this study. The first of these, proposed by Carpentier, Lie, and Servaes (2001), is based on the framework of multitheoretical approaches, later updated by Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2007). Second is the typology illustrated with reference to Sandoval's (2009) subjective/objective analysis and the dialectic approach, subsequently enhanced by Sandoval and Fuchs (2010).

Bailey et al. (2007) identify alternative media with community media, mainstream media, civil society, and rhizome. They distinguish between the essentialist and relationalist approaches and position them with respect to media-centered and society-centered aspects. Referring to the essentialist framework, the "serving the community" approach highlights the significance of communities, and the

other approach in the same framework tries to identify alternative media as a “part of civil society.” In the relationalist framework, alternative media are either taken as “an alternative to mainstream” or correlated with the Deleuzian “rhizome” metaphor. The approach on which this study is grounded defines alternative media as an alternative to mainstream, and interprets these media either as a component to supplement the mainstream or to criticize it by producing counterhegemonic discourses (Bailey et al., 2007). In other words, an alternative agenda provided by alternative media can fill the gap in mainstream coverage. Alternative media also can hold a mediatory position in dissemination of counterhegemonic discourses, because they have a distinctive way of framing news compared to their mainstream counterparts.

In defining alternative media in relation to mainstream media, it is important to state whether alternative media should compete with mainstream media or be separately positioned. The efforts of Sandoval and Fuchs to theorize alternative media provide an inclusive framework as an expansion to the argument in question. For them, various aspects of the typical characteristics of alternative media should be examined in comparison to capitalist mass media. Based on Giddens’ (1984) objective and subjective social theories, this dialectic approach defines the characteristic qualities of alternative media and draws a distinction between media structures and media actors (Sandoval, 2009). In the typology, *subjective approaches* focus on media actors and their production processes. These approaches argue that media can have emancipatory societal effects if they contribute to the democratizing of access to media production to give ordinary people a voice (Sandoval, 2009). Thus, subjective approaches tend to define alternative media as participatory media. Ideally, the alternative media is expected to abolish the distinction between producer and consumer, and consumers of alternative media can simultaneously participate in the production processes. *Objective approaches*, on the other hand, criticize alternative media regarding critical content. According to these approaches, alternative media can realize their emancipatory potentials by negating the ideological character of capitalist mass media by providing critical media content (Sandoval, 2009). At the structural level, the economic form of media products is indicative of their critical content: Ideal alternative media bring out noncommercial outputs instead of commodities. They offer critical content and/or complex form as opposed to ideological content in a standardized form (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). With reference to this theoretical framework illustrated by Sandoval and Fuchs, this study focuses on the TEKEL workers protest at a content level.

### **The TEKEL Workers Protest**

The TEKEL workers protest was the result of neoliberal privatization policies and developed into one of the most significant protests in the social movements history of Turkey. The privatization of TEKEL began with the sale of the alcoholic drinks unit in 2004, proceeded with the sale of the tobacco unit in 2008, and concluded with the closing of all other remaining units, including the tobacco silos (on the privatization process, see Türkmen, 2012, pp. 29–48). This privatization brought many negative effects on the workers—primarily the threat to their job security. Even those retaining their jobs were forced to work according to Article 4/C of the State Personnel Law No. 657, which offers them the status of public employee, albeit with lower wages and fewer rights. Growing protests, triggered by the dispute between the workers and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), embraced diverse segments of the public. The protests acquired many new dimensions as the labor unions began negotiating with the government representatives.

British American Tobacco won the third privatization tender run by the Privatization Administration for the TEKEL tobacco unit in 2008. Workers' positions remained ambiguous due to the sales of TEKEL properties without any employment safeguard plan. The enormity of the problem became clear when it was announced that not all workers would be retained by British American Tobacco in the Ballica establishment of Samsun. Workers were obliged to accept the 4/C status, having signed a temporary employment contract, and were permitted until January 31, 2010, to be transferred to other public institutions or lose their transfer rights as stated by the government. Since the problem remained unresolved during and after the negotiations between the labor unions and the government, workers began organizing for a large-scale resistance.

Broadly defined, Article 4/C of the State Personnel Law No. 657 outlines the conditions for temporary workers who are transferred to other public institutions due to privatization. 4/C status was proposed to TEKEL workers, who would agree to work temporarily in the privatized units without receiving their severance payments. Accordingly, 4/C workers would be subject to the following regulations:<sup>2</sup>

- 4/C allows for a working duration of up to 10 months. Under certain circumstances, this given period can be limited to 4 months.
- 4/C personnel are not permitted to take employment to work in any other job.
- 4/C personnel are allowed one day of paid vacation per month.
- 4/C personnel are not allowed to benefit from collective agreement rights.
- Gross wages are calculated according to the educational status of the personnel.
- Pensions are also determined upon the proposed wage rates.
- Abolition of contract labor disqualifies the personnel from severance and notice pay.

Opposing the proposed terms and conditions, TEKEL workers—including 12,000 workers from all over Turkey—gathered in Ankara to begin their resistance on December 15, 2009 (Yıkılmaz & Kumlu, 2011). The protest lasted for 78 days and ended on March 2, 2010, when the Council of State suspended the execution of the legal arrangement that gave temporary workers 30 days to apply for their transfer to relevant institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Certain articles of 4/C regarding severance pay and salary increase were revised during the ongoing process of the resistance, and the annual term of employment of 4/C workers was increased from 10 months to 11 months. Refer to Council of Ministers Decree No. 2009/15759 for more information.

### Methodology

Although minority rights, gender rights, and human rights issues are linked to the domain of alternative media, mainstream media also have a considerable role in representing certain groups (Ryan, 1991). For this reason, the approach adopted in this research was to define alternative media as an alternative to the mainstream (Bailey et al., 2007), and a comparative analysis was conducted in which mainstream media was designated as the variable for presenting the case. A preliminary investigation was conducted prior to the research to identify the gap between alternative and mainstream coverage. Findings from the labor category, which was substantially induced by the TEKEL workers protest, indicated the contrast between both agendas. In accordance with the role of alternative media in social movements, guided by the coverage and framing practices, it was possible to reveal the issues related to the TEKEL workers protest in the political arena. Because the TEKEL workers protest has multiple aspects, it touches upon issues of privatization, resistance, labor, and class. From this backdrop emerged the hypothesis that media boosts certain issues pivotal to resistance while ignoring others.

Based upon the approach of Bailey et al. (2007), alternative and mainstream media were examined in two clusters to facilitate the comparative analysis. The aim here is not to create a dichotomy between the two media clusters by generalizing the qualities of sample news media analyzed through the research. Rather, it is assumed that each type of media has its own specific qualities. As Atton (2002, p. 8) asserts, "Even within a single area of alternative media there is much heterogeneity (of styles, of contributions, of perspectives)." However, the TEKEL workers protest is a distinct case on which consensus is observed among the various media representing the alternative and the mainstream. In accordance with the idea to pay particular attention to critical content (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010), news articles from different media were examined through a framing analysis to illustrate the outputs resulting from nonmainstream practices. According to Rusciano (2003), framing is often best understood through comparisons, whether temporal or spatial, where the same events are depicted through different journalistic lenses.

*Frame* in this research is identified as an instrument to explore how a particular issue is presented by the media. To undertake this exploration, frames were first generated by a qualitative analysis of news articles (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Following deductive classification regarding the TEKEL workers case, the frames were coded as holistic variables in a manual content analysis (de Vreese, 2005b; Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The overwhelming majority of references in the news articles interpreted the protest by concentrating on certain conditions. Thus, the frames were conceptualized according to certain symbolic elements highlighted by the media. A survey of the news articles prior to the analysis eventuated an a priori formulation of the coding scheme. Here, issue-specific media frames were coded as independent variables (de Vreese, 2005a; Scheufele, 1999).

The methodology of this research is based on the hypothesis, which assumes that alternative and mainstream media characterize frames in different ways; thus, the way a frame is characterized has particular influences on the narrative of the text. Since the conventional frames are not effective in pointing out the differences in a comparative analysis, peripheral units of analysis were offered to elaborate on how

the TEKEL workers protest was presented by different media. At this point, issue components were assigned for each frame to clarify the use of frames for further analysis. In the coding scheme, each defined frame possesses issue components that refer to certain meanings along with keywords that help standardize the classification. To complement the findings from the framing analysis, the depiction of the protest, based on a value scale of references, is provided as a part of the research.

Twelve websites were included within the scope of this study. Bianet, Emek Dünyası.net, Kronik Muhafif, Sendika.org, Sol Haber, and Turnusol, which provide news on a wide range of themes, were analyzed as alternative news media.<sup>3</sup> Akşam, Habertürk, Milliyet.com.tr, Radikal, Sabah, and Zaman Online represent various conglomerates as the samples from mainstream news media. Data were collected from these news media over a 30-day period beginning on February 2, when the need for a general strike was announced by the labor unions, and ending on March 3, immediately after the protest ended.<sup>4</sup> This period covers the coding of frames as well as the quantitative data present on websites.

### **Coverage of the Protest**

As the theoretical basis of this study, agenda setting can be defined as the process of ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public, and policy elites (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). It is, ipso facto, a premeditated theatrical process for determining the position of an issue on the agenda. Fundamentally, a news agenda is a set of events or issues that are portrayed in coverage at one point in time or over time (Nisbet, 2008). A news agenda is shaped around a set of issues that refer to a social problem, often conflictual, that has received mass media coverage (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

In the first phase of the research, the amount of coverage devoted to the TEKEL workers protest was examined to understand the extent to which the issue was mentioned on alternative and mainstream agendas (see details on the methodology in McLeod, Becker, & Byrnes, 1991). During the coding process, *prominence* was taken to be the most significant standard of classification. Prominence is of interest because placement of stories signals importance to readers, a key component in agenda setting (Schaefer, 2003). Accordingly, special attention was given to the number of stories on the home page and to the number of days the stories appeared on the home page. Additionally, the number of stories on section pages and columns was examined.

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<sup>3</sup> Emek Dünyası.net and Sendika.org have limited areas of interest that mainly concentrate on the issues of labor and workers' rights.

<sup>4</sup> Data were retrieved by the end of each day at 00.00. Because Web content can be edited or removed completely, relevant Web pages were saved using the *ScrapBook* extension of Mozilla Firefox.

**Table 1. Coverage of the TEKEL Workers Protest on Alternative Media.**

	<b>Home page</b> (the number of stories concerning the protest on the home page)	<b>Duration<sup>a</sup></b> (the number of days the protest appeared on the home page)	<b>Sections<sup>b</sup></b> (the number of stories concerning the protest on the section pages)	<b>Columns</b> (the number of columns referring to the protest)
Bianet	68	30 [7]	—	14
Emek Dünyası.net	97	30 [2]	—	8
Kronik Muhaliif	8	11 [7]	—	1
Sendika.org	111	30	—	27
Sol Haber	244	30	—	34
Turnusol	26	30 [14]	—	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>97</b>

a Repeating news articles from the previous days are given in brackets and added to the sum.

b Sections were not coded, because all the news articles first appeared on the home page.

The preliminary data revealed the limited newsmaking capabilities of alternative media, on which only certain issues were covered. Not all the alternative media, however, have the same degree of influence in the production and circulation of news. Among those selected for research, Sol Haber presented the most news stories on the TEKEL resistance (see Table 1). Additionally, alternative media do not portray a repetitive pattern in their agendas and are able to immediately shift to a certain issue. They have the ability to set their own agendas and restructure their coverage to focus on a case of their interest, as observed in coverage of the TEKEL workers protest.

**Table 2. Coverage of the TEKEL Workers Protest on Mainstream Media.**

	<b>Home page</b> (the number of stories concerning the protest on the home page)	<b>Duration</b> (the number of days the protest appeared on the home page)	<b>Sections</b> (the number of stories concerning the protest on the section pages)	<b>Columns</b> (the number of columns referring to the protest)
Akşam	23	17	11	11
Habertürk	16	11	27	8
Milliyet.com.tr	12	10	108	21
Radikal	42	24	83	17
Sabah	15	13	65	17
Zaman Online	21	13	31	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>79</b>

The mainstream media, on the other hand, paid less attention to the protest compared to the alternative media. The amount of coverage of the protest is limited considering the large number of news items retrieved from wire services. Since the numbers symbolize the value attached to the event, it must be affirmed that Zaman Online, which, at the time, was known for its close stance to the AKP government, has the lowest count. According to the data displayed in Table 2, there is a significant contrast between the number of stories on the home pages and sections, which again attributes value to prominence.

To summarize, most of the alternative media consistently covered TEKEL resistance.<sup>5</sup> Mainstream media seemed relatively less interested in the issue, but did not completely ignore it due to the growing tension of the resistance. Between February 2 and March 3, the numbers of news items coded were 554 and 454 for the alternative and mainstream media, respectively. Additionally, a wide range of columns, which typically broaden discussion of an issue, contributed to the assignment of the frames.

### **Frames of the Protest**

The substantive basis of agenda setting relies on the coverage of a potential issue, not the way it is covered. In contrast, the basic framing approach assumes that the locus of effect lies within the description of an issue or the label used in news coverage about the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In a comparative perspective, framing introduces another important differentiation in the notion of effects, because framing influences *how* audiences think about issues, just as agenda setting influences *what* issues to think about (Jensen, 2002). De Vreese (2005b, p. 53) simplifies McCombs' (2004) rationale:

<sup>5</sup> Kronik Muhafiz is an exclusion for not being regularly updated. The website was shut down five years after it had been established.

“While agenda-setting theory deals with the salience of issues, framing is concerned with the presentation of issues.”

Framing is an individual psychological process, but it is also an organizational process and product and a political strategic tool (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2008). Media institutions and the political arena are the primary fields in which frames are set. In media institutions, framing is a part of the daily news production routine. When their connections to the political bodies are considered, however, framing turns into a process of conflict. After all, as a pivotal instrument for politics, mass media has a mediatory role in delivering the discourses from the political arena to the public. Social movements, as well, are deemed as another field for frame setting. Regarding social movements, the component of conflict becomes even more evident. In the framing process whereby communicators act—consciously or not—to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, some facts are made more noticeable than others (Kuypers, 2010). At this point, frames help to construct the dominant point of view.

The scheme developed for this research consists of the four following frames: *struggle for rights*, *ideology*, *political approach*, and *economic balance* (see Table 3). Issue components that connote political, social, economic, and legal references are placed within the relevant frame. The connections between keywords and issue components are set regarding the predefined descriptions, so that consistency of items in the scheme was assured. References are inserted to reveal how the same topic was presented by different media. In Table 3, not all frames are listed for an issue component; only the ones according to their use by media are shown.

**Table 3. Frames and Issue Components of TEKEL Workers Protest.**

<b>Frames</b>			
<i>Issue components</i>	<i>References</i>	<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Description</i>
<b>Struggle for Rights</b>			
<i>Organizing Labor</i>	(-, 0, +)	precedency, public support, 'tek-el', 'çok-el', call for protests, union movements, platforms, prima facie case	Workers are gathered to protect their rights. 4/C policy offered by the government is not accepted
<i>Legal Rights</i>	(0, +)	rights, demand, health/job security, severance pay, law	
<i>Resistance</i>	(-, 0, +)	hope, struggle, act, protest, hunger strike, solidarity, black ribbon	
<b>Ideology</b>			
<i>Class Consciousness</i>	(0, +)	labor, synergy, belief, democracy, politization	The underlying fact is class consciousness which is also in contradiction with the 4/C status. Protests are supported by various sections of the public
<i>4/C Status</i>	(-, 0, +)	seizure, exploitation, injustice, appointment, cancellation	
<i>Supportive Protests</i>	(-, 0, +)	right to have leisure time, general strike, political platform, occupation, media, to gain favor	
<b>Political Approach</b>			
<i>Antigovernment</i>	(-, 0, +)	irresponsibility, discrimination, abuse, opposition	Workers are in resistance to the government. The only way to cease the protest is negotiation
<i>Antiprotest</i>	(-, 0, +)	crime, threat, misuse, conspiracy, collusion, provocation, propaganda, investigation, PKK, use of force, violence, transfer, 3H, illegal, prohibition	
<i>Negotiation</i>	(-, 0, +)	meeting, deal, enhancement, justice, decision, state council, ECHR	
<b>Economic Balance</b>			
<i>Privatization</i>	(0, +)	investment, public good, subcontractor, spoil, victim	The problem which can not be solved in the economic context has negative affects on wealth
<i>Market Economy</i>	(-, 0, +)	cost, (neo)liberal, capitalist, global, free economy, employer, voucher, pay roll	
<i>Unemployment</i>	(-, +)	employment, agitation, demagogu, 'orphan rights'	

The *struggle for rights* frame highlights the workers' rights and the struggle to regain these rights. Organizing labor, legal rights, and resistance are the items that define the frame. Forms of organizing, including labor unions, were associated with organizing labor; legislation references were embodied in legal rights; references to the protest and solidarity issues were gathered under the theme of resistance. Findings regarding the struggle for rights frame were typically straight news accounts; however, some narratives of conflict stories were encountered in the resistance theme.

The *ideology* frame, on one hand, focuses on class perception and 4/C status as the fundamental causes of the conflict and involves other protests in support of TEKEL workers on the other. Class consciousness, 4/C status, and supportive protests constitute the frame. Class consciousness is comprised of sociological debates on the historical development of the working class. 4/C status is mainly used for references to adverse working conditions. The supportive protests component encompasses the protests of other groups or institutions that go along with the TEKEL workers resistance. News articles attributing to supportive protests were mainly reaction stories.

The *political approach* frame illustrates the political extent of the resistance. Antigovernment, antiprotest, and negotiation are the issue components of this frame. Forms of opposition with an emphasis on political stance are considered in the antigovernment component, and antiprotest refers to the discourses aiming to discredit or antagonize the protesters. These two issue components were often reported as reaction stories. Negotiation, on the other hand, involves opinions on a potential agreement between the workers, labor unions, and government representatives. Narratives employing the negotiation component were, on the whole, consensus stories. Several conjecture stories were also coded regarding the progress of reconciliation.

The *economic balance* frame reflects the economic outcomes resulting from the protest. With respect to this frame, the problem cannot be solved in the economic context, and the incident has negative effects on the overall economy. Privatization, market economy, and unemployment form the grounds of this frame. Privatization relates the causes of the resistance to former legislation and omits the responsibilities of government representatives. The market economy issue component assumes that the problem is a consequence of the capitalist market economy. Hence, it excludes the decisions made by the people serving the governing institutions. Finally, the unemployment component emphasizes the high unemployment rates in Turkey and usually does not endorse the resistance.

In quantitative terms, the research data consisted of 1,008 articles, 554 from alternative media and 454 from mainstream media. Additionally, 176 columns, 97 from alternative media and 79 from mainstream media, were analyzed. A total of 1,184 news articles and columns were incorporated in this research, in which 1,320 issue components were coded. The number of issue components is higher than the sum of news articles and columns that were studied, because the unit of analysis in framing is an issue component found in a story, not the news article itself. In some cases, more than one issue component in a news article was encountered, depending on the diversity of aspects presented in the story. In such cases, references present in the news were taken into account when coding (see Williams, Shapiro, & Cutbirth, 1991, for more details on the methodology). For instance, if both a union's decision to engage in a rally with TEKEL workers and an investigation of the people who support the resistance were

addressed in a news item, then the item is first put to supportive protests and also coded under the antiprotest component.

The frames, as shown in Figure 1, were not evenly distributed. Each media had its own approach to the resistance. However, media representing the same cluster concentrated more on the parallel aspects of the issue. In some cases, media paid special attention to a certain aspect without regard to its counterparts in the same cluster. Struggle for rights (35%) and ideology (34%) were the dominant frames on alternative media. Political approach (25%) is another frame in which alternative media were interested. These are followed by economic balance, which has a 6% share. The mainstream media, on the other hand, portray a more widely distributed pattern, which shows some similarities to alternative media: political approach (45%), ideology (29%), struggle for rights (21%), and economic balance (5%). When both types of media are compared, the ideology and economic balance frames have similar shares, whereas the use of struggle for rights and political approach frames differs depending on editorial policies.

Analysis of the issue components provides more information on the use of frames and helps us understand the ways in which the TEKEL workers protest was covered by different media. Since the number of references on alternative media was relatively high for the struggle for rights frame, it has a considerable significance in Figure 1. Mainstream media paid less attention to this opposing frame, but did not completely ignore it. The struggle for rights frame confirms Meyer's (1995, p. 177) argument on the framing potentials of mainstream media: "Despite the overwhelming disadvantages confronting challenging frames, mainstream media are not monolithic, offering only one hegemonic view of contemporary issues; neither however, are they equal." Here the essential difference between the two media derives from alternative media's motivation to stimulate collective consciousness. The use of the organizing labor component by alternative media is generally observed in their press releases calling for action. Mainstream media, on the other hand, quoted the announcements from official sources and did not emphasize the workers' organizing practices. For the alternative media, the legal rights issue component has a function in covering issues such as job security, health insurance, and severance pay. In addition, legislation was often mentioned regarding this issue component. Mainstream media also referred to legislation, but without offering criticism. The protest occasionally was considered to be legitimate on mainstream media. On alternative media, the resistance component involved those discourses that were relevant to the course of events. In some cases, alternative media reporters joined the protest themselves and reported directly from the protest venue. Resistance is also mentioned in many mainstream news articles and columns, but shallow reporting in this area resulted in a lack of attention to key points.

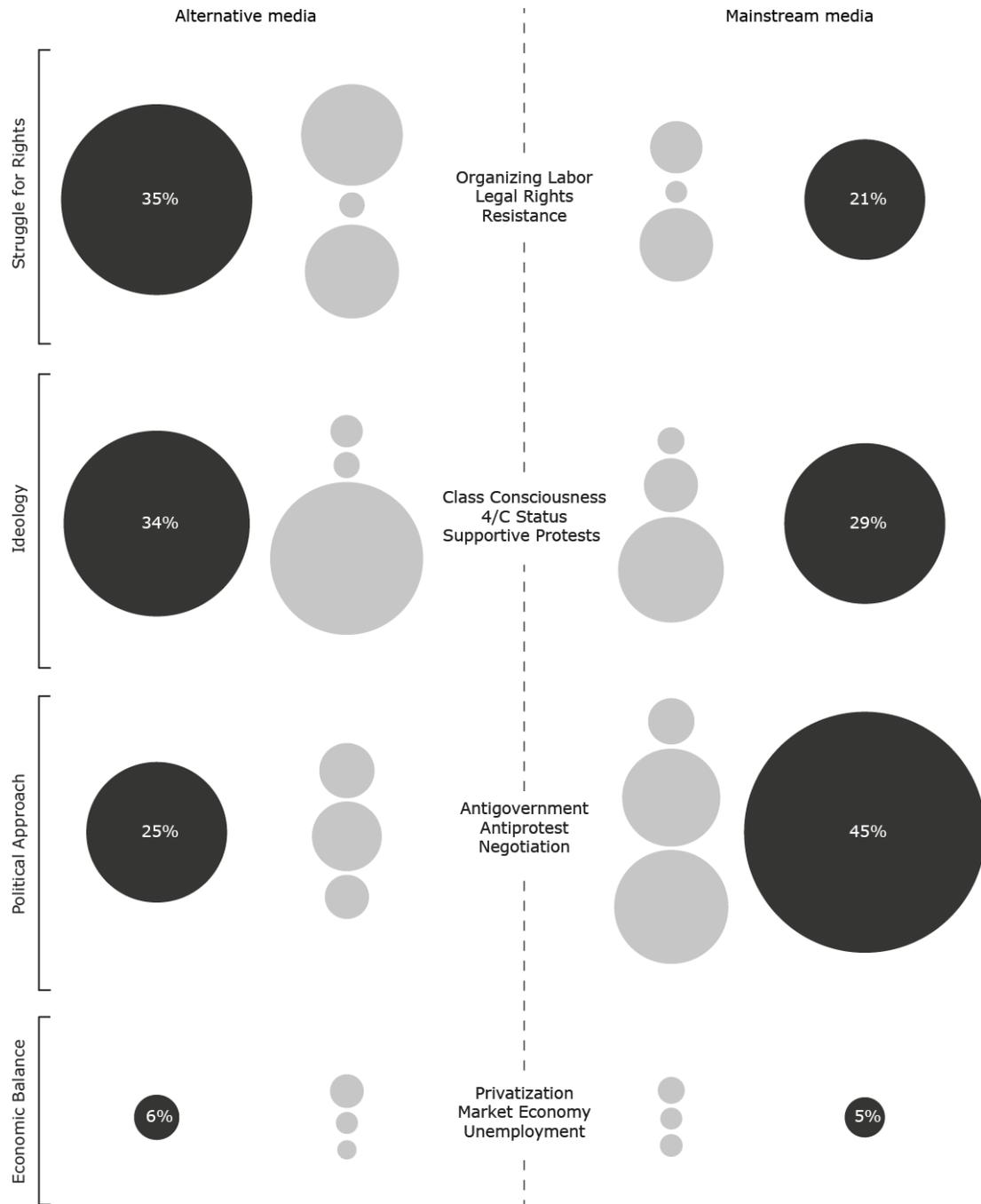
Political discourses are predominantly subject to the context drawn by the political approach frame. Considering its significant presence on mainstream media, the role of this frame can be associated with the policy agenda. The number of references for this frame is relatively high because mainstream media hosts the statements of political agents. The issue components of this frame have contradictory connotations on different media. For instance, the antigovernment component involves an element of conflict and positions the TEKEL workers protest as being against the government and its representatives. In this context, news on alternative media blamed the government for the circumstances that eventually triggered the protest. On the mainstream media, references to the antigovernment component were

mostly based on the discourses of the opposition parties. Such articles, in general, involved direct quotations without commentaries to avoid any liability.

The antiprotest issue component is comprised of the discourses that address the legitimacy of the resistance. News articles referring to this issue component on alternative media mostly cover the precautions taken by the public authorities to prevent or undermine the protest. The mainstream news overwhelmingly reflected the opinions of public authority figures, basing stories on official statements that explicitly threatened the protesters. The issue of negotiation was not well received by alternative media, because any kind of agreement between the labor unions and the government would have been unfavorable to the employees. Hence, this issue component mostly occurred after the Council of State suspended the execution of the legal arrangement. References to negotiation in mainstream news ignored the problem that provoked the resistance and diminished its importance.

Consensus by different media is observed in the economic balance frame, which also was the least-used frame (see Figure 1). Underuse of this frame can be understood as a result of the tendency to focus on the consequences rather than the causes of the resistance. The most significant issue component of this frame is privatization, which deals more with discourses on tangible matters. In the alternative media, the scope of this component was defined in relation to TEKEL properties that were sold to private companies. In the mainstream media, the presentation of this case is contradictory. In fact, the resistance was a direct result of AKP policies, and once this argument is accepted, responsibility for the TEKEL problem lies with the government. To develop a good relationship with the government, mainstream media avoided bringing up this argument. The market economy issue component defines the problem in the context of neoliberal development policies. In this context, only a few columns in the alternative media touched upon the background of the resistance. Mainstream media legitimized the decisions made by the government and identified the state of affairs as emerging from recent economic policies. Unemployment, which is least represented among all issue components, employs demagogic discourses. It was nourished by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement in which he emphasized the vast numbers of unemployed in the country and accused TEKEL workers of exaggerating the deficiencies of the 4/C position. Therefore, in the alternative media, unemployment was not limited to the context of the economy. The mainstream media rarely referred to unemployment since it was not brought to the policy agenda.

As Entman (2003) asserts, the sine qua non of successful framing is magnitude, which he defines as emphasizing those elements of the depicted reality that favor one side's position, making them salient, while shrinking those elements that might be used to construct a counterframe. Accordingly, magnitude can measure and help determine the political importance of a news event (Entman, 2003). The frames identified in this research were generally endorsed by certain issue components, except for organizing labor and negotiation. This finding indicates that alternative media were incapable of developing their own specific approaches to framing. On the contrary, it was mainstream framing tactics that guided the use of frames by alternative media.



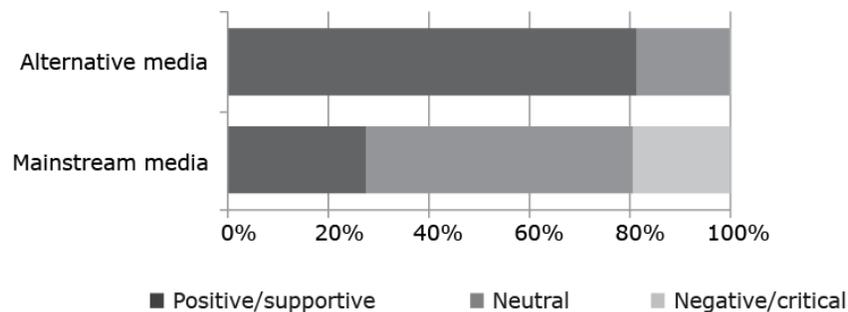
**Figure 1. Distribution of frames and issue components.**

### Depiction of the Protest

Framing analysis provides an overview of the various aspects of media coverage of the TEKEL workers protest. Further investigation supports the depictions of the protest by different media. At this phase, news articles and columns were coded as positive/supportive, neutral, or negative/critical to observe the distribution of references at two levels. Whereas *distribution among media* provides insights into the ideologies and the editorial policies, *distribution among frames* reflects on how the issue was defined. To sustain objectivity during the coding of texts, "TEKEL workers protest" was taken as the independent variable, not the parties taking sides in the conflict (TEKEL workers, governmental bodies, unions, etc.).

### Distribution of References Among Media

Parties of the conflict were clearly defined in almost all news articles. Usually one party dominated the news story, statements of the dominant party were cited in the text, and other parties remained underrepresented. Figure 2 reveals the contrast between the alternative and mainstream media in the depiction of the protest. The major gap occurs in positive/supportive references, where alternative media have an 81.4% share, and the share of mainstream media is 27.6%. A difference of 34.6% was observed in neutral references. Negative/critical references were observed only in the mainstream media, with a share of about 20%.



**Figure 2. Distribution of references among alternative and mainstream media.**

The alternative media consistently supported TEKEL workers in their resistance by referring to certain sources and employed a tone in favor of the protesters. Support by the alternative media primarily stems from editorial decisions endorsing the resistance against privatization. Many alternative media adopted the ideal of advocacy journalism and did not attempt to strive for impartiality in a case with such clear political connotations. The mainstream mode of news varied according to the course of events. In some cases, the mainstream media supported TEKEL workers, and in others, government representatives were favored. Therefore, it was possible to observe diverse approaches in the mainstream media. The discursive quality of mainstream news is inherently related to the editorial policies that result from ideological tendencies. However, depending on the conjecture, the relational network of a media may

cause a shift from the ideologies it represents. For instance, Milliyet occasionally published news articles in favor of TEKEL workers. Yet such a policy is not evidence that Milliyet is a leftist media organization; instead, its views result from the mutual relationship between Doğan Group and the AKP government.<sup>6</sup> In the TEKEL workers case, the resistance was an instrument for Doğan Group to ponder its relations with the AKP government.

### ***Distribution of References Among Frames***

Exploring the distribution of references among frames helps us understand how the media position themselves depending on certain instances. It is also useful in identifying the role of frames in the construction of news stories. Because of the large number of positive/supportive references, no significant differences among issue components were found on alternative media (see Figure 3). On the contrary, mainstream media both supported and criticized the resistance, though a sharp contrast occurred among the frames. Class consciousness, negotiation, and privatization emerged as the issue components on which both media presented similar outcomes.

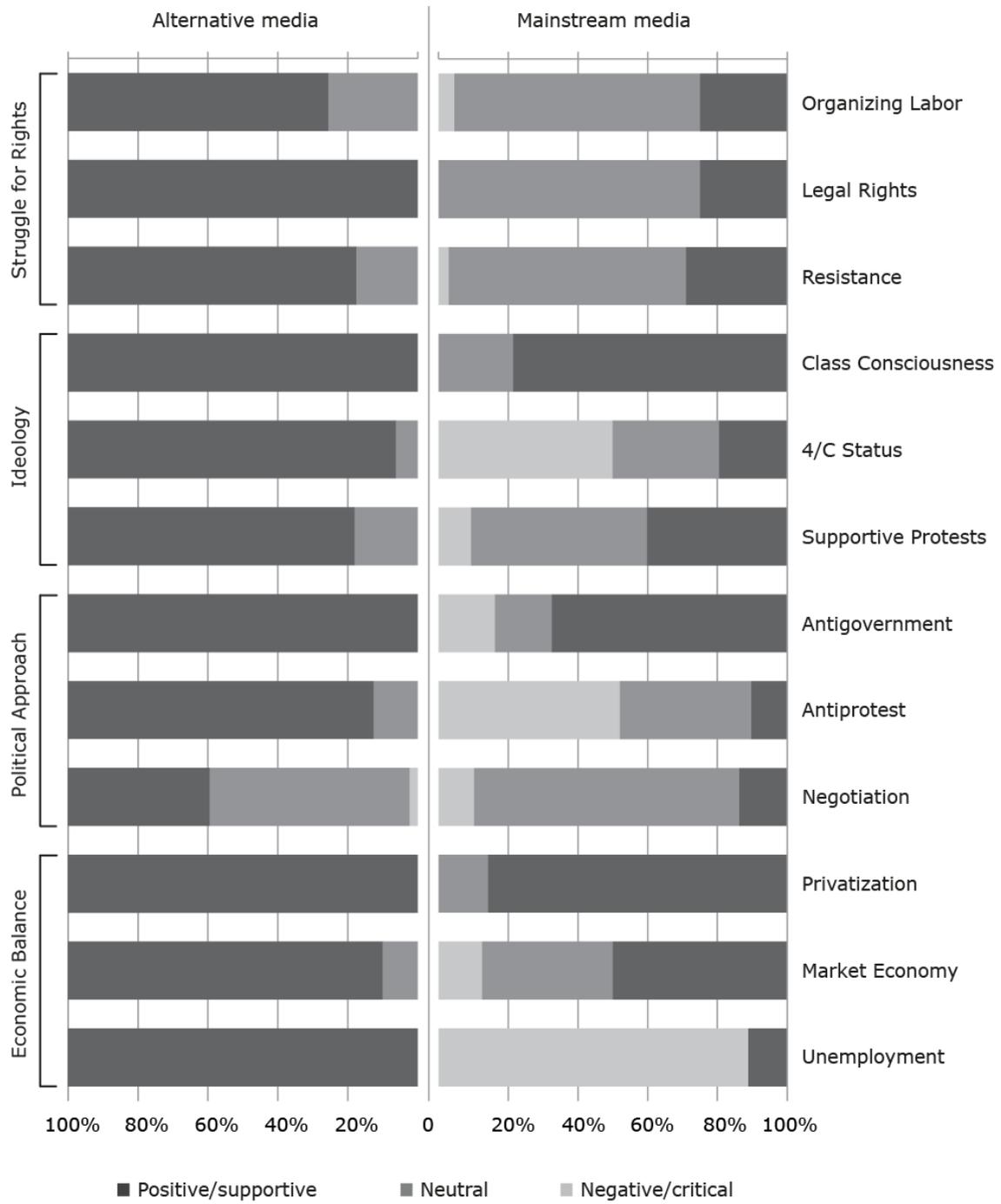
The tension between TEKEL workers and the government as portrayed in the alternative and mainstream media can be clearly observed in the distribution of references. Alternative media reported in favor of TEKEL workers. Every issue component was structured and indirectly employed to support the workers. Nevertheless, neutral references were notable in some issue components; in particular, negotiation had an ambiguous stance for alternative media, as an availing effort to reach an agreement would have resulted in the failure of the resistance. The mainstream media used the frames to build a dichotomy in their news stories. Some frames were used to support the protection of workers' rights, and others mediated in conveying and validating the statements of government representatives. Class consciousness and privatization had positive/supportive references, and the 4/C status, antiprotest, and unemployment issue components served to undermine the resistance.

### **Conclusion**

Because the political foundation of the mainstream media in Turkey is unbalanced, there is a substantial need for an alternative media to compensate. As a rule, the alternative media in Turkey perpetuate rather than unify the scattered political environment of the left. This picture coincides with the rhizomatic nature of alternative media, yet elicits the risk of marginalization, which, according to Ryan (1991), is a fundamental problem for alternative and opposing media. However, as in the case of the TEKEL workers protest, developing a common position that contrasts with the mainstream strengthens the posture of alternative media. As this research reveals, during the period of resistance, the protest was one a few issues on the alternative agenda, and, thanks to their rhizomatic nature, alternative media brought multifold aspects to the coverage of the protest.

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<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Finance imposed a \$2.5 billion fine on Doğan Group for unpaid taxes in 2009. Prior to its acquisition by the joint venture of Demirören and Karacan groups in 2011, Milliyet.com.tr operated under Doğan Group throughout the TEKEL workers protest.



**Figure 3. Distribution of references among frames and issue components.**

Social movements such as the TEKEL workers protest need more attention from mainstream media to move into the public agenda. Nevertheless, mainstream media do not always act in a way that meets the expectations of protesters attempting to gain public support. This is because the mainstream media may undermine a movement's foundations by ignoring its thematic context. For instance, treating the TEKEL workers protest without considering contractual production, agricultural *support* policies, and competition laws provides a limited view of the issue. In such cases, the alternative media play a pivotal role in highlighting the underlying circumstances and promoting the issue so it becomes visible to the mainstream media. Otherwise, there is always the risk for a social movement to detach from its political connotations.

News coverage of mass protest movements generally focuses more on specific acts of protest than on the issues that gave rise to the protests (Iyengar, 1991). Coverage of the TEKEL workers protest also led to results-oriented journalism while ignoring the thematic concerns. The protest was simply attributed to a certain group of people, and the foundations of their resistance were rarely reported. Moreover, alternative media simulated the mainstream framing practices: Privatization, market economy, unemployment, and class consciousness were less referred to by alternative media, similar to the practice of their mainstream counterparts. Such correspondence of framing practices is the manifestation of the alternative media's dependence on mainstream experience. Even so, the alternative media in Turkey are pivotal instruments for providing the public agenda with critical news content.

A significant contribution of alternative media is that they bring together different segments of the society around a common issue and provide the conditions for prior action. They help legitimize the groundings of a public debate through the framing of potential aspects. Those aspects, which are usually presented by activists and pressure groups, depend very much on the political orientation of alternative media as well as the type of the movement in question. For this reason, the particular qualities of an alternative media project should be considered when assessing its capabilities. In Turkey, mainstream media remain the dominant source of online news. However, comparative approaches are helpful in manifesting the nuances found in alternative media. Further research would provide invaluable findings, particularly at the times when political pressure on mainstream media is likely to increase.

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