

‘Action of Violence’ or ‘Democratic Protest’? According to the Turkish Press Gezi Park Resistance

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Abstract

This retrospective study, an analysis of the texts, which appeared during the Gezi Park events in Turkey the pro-government and non-pro-government press. The study prefers to use the quantitative content analysis method since it provides objective and systematic data in content of the communication. In this study, we focus on a one month period, starting from the 27th May 2013 as the first day of Gezi Park Resistance until the 27th June 2013, of all published headlines of six different national newspapers about the Gezi Park Resistance.

Key Words: Gezi Park Protest, media and polarization, action of violence, democratic protests

The newspapers included in the study were chosen in accordance with the study of Esra Vona Kurt, titled “*Media and Polarization: Evaluation of Representation of Polarization in the Media through the Gezi Park Protests*” in respect of ideological perspectives, impact capacity and being pro-government or non-governmental, which

are Zaman, Hürriyet, Sözcü, Sabah, Yeni Şafak and Cumhuriyet newspapers.

Table 1. The Newspapers in the Study:

Newspapers	Circulation	Ideological Perspective
Zaman	Unknown	Religious- Conservative /Pro-government
Hürriyet	329.033	Liberal / Objective
Sözcü	280.186	Nationalist-Left / Non-Governmental
Sabah	306.338	Liberal / Pro-government
Yeni şafak	107.989	Religious- Conservative /Pro-government
Cumhuriyet	49.835	Nationalist-Left / Non-Governmental

On the other hand, Sözcü and Yeni Şafak newspapers in Table 1 are excluded from the study as we could not reach the 2013 archives of these two newspapers; additionally, during the content analysis, on 5th March 2016 due to trustee appointment archives of Zaman newspaper was closed, hence headlines of Zaman could not be obtained between 20th June and 27th June of 2013.

Table 2. The Number and Percentages of Headlines about Gezi Park Resistance According to the Newspapers

Name of Newspapers	Number of Headlines	Percentages
Zaman	175	11,8%
Hürriyet	502	33,9%
Sabah	256	17,3%
Cumhuriyet	548	37%
Total	1481	100%

Considering the one month period during the Gezi Park Resistance, Table 2 indicates that the number and percentages of headlines about Gezi Park Resistance is in accordance with newspapers examined in the study.

Results of study point out that in these four newspapers totally 1481 headlines were about Gezi Park and with the percentage of 37 and 548

headlines Cumhuriyet Newspaper has the highest number.

The second highest number belongs to Hürriyet Newspaper with 502 headlines about Gezi Park and 33,9 percentage. On the other hand, the other newspapers, Zaman and Sabah had the tendency to make less news about Gezi Park with respectively 175 and 256 number of headlines and 11,8 and 17,3 percentages.

In the framework of these limitations, the data gathered by Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Hürriyet and Sabah newspapers was examined under two main categories in the context of “*Gezi Park in respect of otherization and violence*” and “*Gezi Park in respect of democratization*”.

Table 3. Gezi Park in Respect of Otherization and Violence

Concepts	Cumhuriyet	Hürriyet	Sabah	Zaman	Total
Excessive Use of Violence by Police	151	113	22	17	303
Injured/ Killed People	27	46	9	5	87
Damage By Protestors	0	7	26	41	74
Clash/Conflict	40	32	42	1	115
Provocation	7	23	9	10	49
They	11	20	15	13	59
My/Mine/Our/Ours	4	9	13	6	32
Chapulcu/Chapulling	25	12	2	1	40
Conspiracy Theory	3	11	25	6	45
Total	268	273	163	100	804

Table 3 indicates that the distributions of headlines according to the newspapers emphasizing otherization language and violent environment in during the Gezi Park resistance in one month period from 27th May until 27th June 2013.

In Table 3, a total of 804 headlines were written about the Gezi Park Resistance in the framework of *otherization and violence* in these four newspapers of the study; as Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Sabah and Zaman have 268, 273, 163 and 100 headlines respectively.

Looking at the concepts in Table 3, Cumhuriyet newspaper mostly used headlines reflecting the excessive use of violence by police with 151 and secondly, it used headlines about clash/conflict criticizing the government's attitude against protestors with 40 headlines.

Furthermore, Hürriyet newspaper mostly used headlines reflecting the excessive use of violence by police with 113 headlines and secondly used headlines about killed and injured people during Gezi Park, mostly killed and injured protestors by police force, with 32 headlines.

On the other hand, Sabah newspaper mostly used headlines about clash/conflict criticizing the protestors, reflecting as the main source of violence was the attitude of protestors, with 42 headlines and secondly there are 26 headlines about damage by activists.

One distinguishing point about Sabah Newspaper is the intense use of conspiracy theory in headlines with the defense of the idea that the reason of Gezi Park Resistance was planned by external forces due to prevention of rise of Turkey thanks to the Erdoğan government, with 25 headlines.

Finally, Zaman Newspaper mostly used headlines about damage caused by protestors as they are spreading the violence in all cities supporting the Gezi Park Resistance with number of 41 headlines and secondly headlines about excessive use of violence by police force are written.

When analyze the headlines of Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Sabah and Zaman newspapers the headlines between 27 May and 27 June 2013 as a one month period, the distribution of headlines considered Gezi Park Resistance as democratization is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Gezi Park in Respect of Democratization

Concepts	Cumhuriyet	Hürriyet	Sabah	Zaman	Total
Democracy	56	17	6	17	96
Social Movement	0	0	0	0	0
Environment	14	11	7	3	35
Humor/Art	33	23	6	3	65
Resistance	44	7	1	4	56
Negotiation	25	25	36	26	112
Criticism Of Erdoğan	80	14	0	2	96
Solidarity	1	3	0	2	6
Respect	1	2	2	0	5
Apology	1	3	1	4	9
Turkish Spring	1	0	2	0	3
Investigation/ Explanation	5	44	29	3	81
Growth/Support	107	72	2	4	185
Activists	2	8	1	6	17
Assurance	0	0	0	1	1
Total :15	280	229	93	75	677

By looking at the concepts of headlines about whether Gezi Park Resistance can be considered as democratization for Turkey, totally 677 headlines were written in four newspapers, which was less than the headlines about Gezi Park in respect of otherization and violence.

Cumhuriyet Newspaper mostly used headlines about how Gezi Park Resistance had a growing support in public base spreading all over the country and how protestors had a point to join such a resistance with the number of 107 and secondly used the headlines about reflecting criticism of Erdoğan himself considering as the main reason for authoritarian tendency of government which is also the main reason for burst of anger of protestors with number of 80.

Hürriyet Newspaper, as Cumhuriyet, mostly used headlines about how Gezi Park Resistance had a growing support in public base with the number of 72, in addition to this, Hürriyet secondly used the headlines about investigations and explanations with neutral tone mostly coming from the government such as release of protestors in custody with the number of 44.

Furthermore, Sabah and Zaman newspapers, on the contrary to Cumhuriyet and Hürriyet, had focused on the headlines indicating the negotiation effort of government to settle down the movement, especially coming from the President Abdullah Gül and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç with number of 36 and 26 respectively.

CONCLUSION

In 2013, 27th of May; Gezi Park Protest, emerging within environmental awareness of society occurred as curious public opposition in history of Turkish Democracy. Turkish politics, media and academia was clustered into two mainstream expressing participants, reasons and goals behind Gezi Park Protest. While a part of these communities interpreting Gezi Park movement as a protest which is one of the democratic participation tools, other parts of these communities comprehended the situation as a conspiracy theory targeting the fall of government with the assistance of external forces by marginal communities which disturbed peace and public order through usage of violence in streets.

The objective of this papers is to evaluate 6 newspapers about Gezi Park Resistance in Turkey including Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Zaman, and Sabah (because of available archives) within these two mainstreams expressing the Gezi Park Movement while referencing the circulation and paradigm of newspaper. Archive of Zaman newspaper has been blocked to access since 5th of March, 2016, so archival research of Zaman covering daily presses between 20th of June and 27th of June cannot be done.

The outputs of research illustrate the footsteps of Turkish Media on how they interpreted the Gezi Park resistance. Firstly, polarization and hatred related articles in newspapers rather than democratic discourse were quantitatively overwhelming. The reason why the number of arti-

cles and headlines including polarization and hatred were overwhelming was not attached to idea that the Gezi Park resistance was a violent movement. Especially those who consider Gezi Park resistance as a practice of legal rights gave a large space for police brutality in their headlines and criticized that the government took a path to suppress movement by force. Consequently, in quantitative perspective, that the identification of the Gezi movement with violence is not derived from that movement itself has violent components; it is welded by brutal intervention of method by law enforcements. Especially, disproportionate usage of force by police was the most important topic in articles of Cumhuriyet and Hürriyet. Regardless of the inability to support with quantitative data, the cutback of police brutality based articles in Hürriyet is remarkable when you take into consideration that it launched these types of articles more than the others. Hürriyet published statements of government officials after 7th of June for a few days.

During the Gezi Protest, Zaman and Sabah gave a large margin of pages expressing the damage protestors caused in the area more than any other newspapers. The terms like '*us and them*', '*çapulcu*' considered as tools of symbolic violence are equally presented in the articles of each newspapers regardless of their political opinions. Sabah extremely made analysis of Gezi Park resistance in terms of conspiracy theories. On the other hand, Cumhuriyet made news to claim false charges on conspiracy theories.

When we take a look to the opinion of Turkish media which reviews Gezi Protest in expression of democratic rights, we see more distinct disintegration of thoughts on Gezi Protest then reviews in favor of polarization and violence. Cumhuriyet is the newspaper, which makes a lot of news examining Gezi Protest in favor of democracy.

Even it could be said that there is a contradiction between the con-

tents and headlines of Hürriyet and Zaman: namely, the articles reveal the Gezi Park protest quantitatively in favor of democracy, as an opposite idea of the headlines. Hürriyet made positive reviews implying Gezi Parkı resistance as reflection of democratic rights. However, review of Zaman on Gezi Park Protest gave credits reconciliatory attitude of government official on intervention to protests that targets the suppression of movement.

In democratic regimes, critics of government policies should be reviewed in favor of democratic freedom. Therefore, the government attitude applied in the Gezi Park protests had been criticized with regard to personal approach of Prime Minister Erdoğan by writing a contrarian piece of papers that mostly belonged to Cumhuriyet and Hürriyet. During the Gezi protests, Zaman and Sabah almost never gave a space to criticize the attitude of the government against Gezi Park Resistance. While Cumhuriyet and Hürriyet giving credits to increasing support of Gezi Park Protest through headline implying societal protest, Sabah and Zaman had difficulties to see the elephant in the room.

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