

# Journal of Economy Culture and Society

ISSN: 2602-2656 / E-ISSN: 2645-8772

Research Article

## Market Liberals at a Crossroads in Post-Gezi Türkiye: Making Sense of a Framing Dispute

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**Submitted:** 06.04.2022

**Revision Requested:** 16.06.2022

**Last Revision Received:** 24.11.2022

**Accepted:** 28.11.2022

**Published Online:** 25.05.2023

**Citation:** Akin, H.B., Ozsahin, M.C., Akin, S. (2023). Market liberals at a crossroads in post-gezi Türkiye: making sense of a framing dispute. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, 67, 73-95.  
<https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2022-1099436>

### ABSTRACT

The Gezi protests were a watershed moment for market liberals since it triggered inter-movement and intra-movement schisms. A flagship institution of market liberals, Liberal Düşünce Topluluğu (the Association of Liberal Thought) underwent such a schismatic process and, consequently, new market-liberal organizations arose from the schism, which was characterized by a frame dispute with the ALT over the policies pursued by the incumbent government, Justice and Development Party (JDP). The framing dispute between the two factions occurred along the lines of securing democracy versus the restriction of state power. This study delineates the root causes of the framing dispute between market liberals. To this end, two factors are proposed to account for it within the context of this paper. These two factors can be encapsulated as the growing conservative/liberal division among market liberals and entrenched interpersonal patronage networks within political circles which is closely related to the changing nature of government-civil society relations in Turkey. Drawing from semi-structured interviews, publications of market liberals, and a good number of secondary sources, we aim to shed light on the rift within market liberals in post-Gezi Turkey.

**Keywords:** Liberalism, Civil Society, Turkey, Gezi Protests, Frame Dispute



## 1. Introduction

It is a truism to claim that liberal values in Turkish society are not so prevalent and deep-rooted to constitute a genuine political alternative on the basis of pure liberalism. Some exceptions notwithstanding, for the most part, liberals have sought to cooperate with conservative and Islamist (political) movements to be able to participate in Turkish political life. Considering non-governmental activities, one can easily detect numerous liberal civil society organizations operating in the public realm. Of these civil society organizations, *Liberal Düşünce Topluluğu* (Association for Liberal Thought, hereafter ALT), is an Ankara-based institution that has been advocating liberal principles since the 1990s. ALT and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) have been the two longest-lasting and influential formations of market liberalism or classical liberalism for many years. Market liberals<sup>1</sup> succeeded in acting together during the 1990s and the early 2000s, but that situation changed following consecutive events, and both inter and intra-movement disputes in classical liberal circles emerged. Even though there had been some disagreements about several minor cases previously, the clear division between market liberals was crystallized by the Gezi Protests. In response to the souring political environment, many market liberals within ALT began to express their dissatisfaction more vocally toward the incumbent government's *modus operandi*.

Consequently, the above-mentioned disagreements within ALT led to an inter-movement and intra-movement division within market liberals at different times. The inter-movement dispute during the Gezi protests precipitated the estrangement of *3H Hareketi* (hereafter 3H M, an Istanbul-based youth organization founded upon the principles of classical liberalism and libertarianism in 2006), the founders of which were once closely associated with ALT.<sup>2</sup> The *Özgürlük Araştırmaları Derneği*, the Freedom Researches Association (hereafter FRA), consisting mainly of academics, students, and professionals, was established more recently in Ankara in 2014 with similar principles to those of the 3H M. While the FRA was founded upon an intra-movement division within the ALT, the 3H M had never become a part of the ALT; rather it was involved in an inter-movement framing dispute with the ALT in the aftermath of the Gezi protests. Although both organizations had once had strong ties with ALT, they fell out and adopted different frames over the unfolding political developments in Turkey in due course. Whilst these two dissident organizations accused the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party-hereafter JDP) government of violating fundamental rights and civil liberties, ALT favored the ruling party by emphasizing its legitimacy stemming from its democratically elected status.

Against such a background, several questions beg answers concerning the schism that took place within market liberals. What are the frames adopted by the diverse liberal circles that caused inter and intra-movements divisions? Second, related to the first question, what are the perceptions vis a vis the root causes of such a framing dispute within market liberals? Taking these questions into consideration, this study aims to shed light on the framing disputes which resulted in fractionalization within the market-liberal movement with an emphasis on ALT. It was selected

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1 The term liberal in Turkey is often used to describe groups that support political freedoms and freedom of expression but are not always pro-free market economy. The distinguishing feature of ALT is its commitment to the market liberalism which is in line with understanding of Pils and Schoenegger claiming "a market economy fosters the ends of a liberal society best" (Pils & Schoenegger, 2021, p. 2). For this reason, we preferred the concept of market liberalism in this study. The term, market liberals, as employed in this manuscript denotes the liberals in the classical sense who advocate free markets with limited government intervention. For different definitions of liberal(s) in Turkey see (Gürpınar, 2013; Köroğlu, 2012; Uslu, 2015).

2 Since 3H M was not a formal branch of ALT, this estrangement was not a formal disengagement but rather an ideological one caused by the attitudes of leading market liberals in ALT towards the ruling party and its policies after the Gezi Park protests.

as a case for this paper since it is generally accepted as a roof organization that has gathered classical liberals in Turkey for over 20 years. Accordingly, this research explores the different diagnostic framings of market liberals concerning the political currents in Turkey, mostly revolving around the policies of the JDP. As an interpretive case study using semi-structured interviews and secondary sources, including chronicles, it is shown that the different perceptions toward the post-Gezi political environment in Turkey resulted in a frame dispute which culminated in a fissure in ALT. To this aim, three critical junctures, namely the Gezi Protests, the December 17-25 corruption probes, and July 15, 2016, failed coup are highlighted in this paper.<sup>3</sup> To clarify, these events provided a ground on which the frame dispute was built. Moreover, drawing on the related literature, the growing conservative-liberal divide amongst market liberals and the entrenched interpersonal patronage networks with political circles are identified as the underlying perceptions vis a vis the causes of the framing dispute which resulted in a schism. In so doing, this study explores a recent phenomenon, namely the fractionalization among market liberals in Turkey about which there are only anecdotal descriptions lacking any empirical evidence. Moreover, the nature of government-civil society relations was another determinant according to the data gathered from various sources to account for frame disputes. This also indicates that the government-civil society nexus is a relevant parameter that ought to be considered in understanding schism and fractionalization in non-western democracies.

This paper is structured as follows: the first part gives an overview of the history of ALT from its inception and the process of fractionalization, the second section reviews the theory of schism in organizations and discusses the methodology utilized for the research, the next section reveals the discrepancies among liberals in relation to the post-Gezi political environment in Turkey and the underlying factors causing the framing dispute. Lastly, a general synopsis of the schism is given in light of the theoretical and empirical debate laid out in the previous sections.

## 2. Liberalism in Turkey: From Past to Present

Although the first traces were found in the early 18th-century print media (Berkes, 1998, p. 42), the idea of modern liberalism purporting to the rule of law and a free-market system based predominantly on private property emerged mostly during the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the stage of history in the second half of the 19th century. The failed reform attempts of Sultan Selim III were accomplished to some extent by Sultan Mahmut II. Among other aspects, Sened-i İttifak, which is considered to be the sharing of power held by the central authority with a few agrarian elites, was regarded as a step towards a kind of constitutional rule<sup>4</sup> (Karpas, 2002,

3 Gezi refers to a series of demonstrations that started in May 2013 as a protest to environmentally disruptive urbanization plans of the Gezi Park in Istanbul. With the violent eviction of protestors by the police, the demonstration escalated, and Turkish society was divided in the matter: on the one hand those supporting the demonstrators for basic human rights like freedom of expression, and on the other hand those supporting the government because they considered the uprising as not legitimate. The incidents of 17-25 December 2013 refer to a series of events following a criminal investigation involving several key political and bureaucratic figures in the Turkish government. Since high-ranking officers were also involved, the discussions around the investigations were more political than legal. Thus, some parts of society believed that it was merely an attempt to topple the government (partly also because it was believed to be carried out with the support of the Gülenists, led by former preacher F. Gülen). Others, however, evaluated the events as a violation of the rule of law. The coup attempt of July 15th, 2016, by some military cadres was allegedly orchestrated by F. Gülen and caused a further widening of the rift within society.

4 Karpas emphasizes this point by stating that "But, interestingly enough, others such as Ziya Gökalp, father of Turkish nationalist ideology, regarded the rise of the *ayans* as the beginning of a struggle for freedom." (Karpas, 2002, pp. 41-42, emphasis in original).

p. 40, p. 48; Göcek, 1996, p. 51; Köroğlu, 2012, p. 120). The declaration of the Tanzimat Fermanı and later the Islahat Fermanı, which ensure equal rights both for non-Muslims and Muslims, and the debates on free trade and liberty, in general, can be seen as signs of the development of a general sense of liberalism in Ottoman Empire. The ideas which can be considered within the context of political and economic liberalism were discussed widely by various prominent intellectual figures in the second half of the 19th century (Karpas, 2002, p. 51; Köroğlu, 2012, p. 120).

In relation to the political demands for re-enacting the constitution, which was suspended by Sultan Abdülhamit II, Prince Sabahattin, a member of the royal family and nephew of the Sultan, became prominent as one of the leaders of the Young Turks and popular due to his ideas favoring decentralization and private entrepreneurship (Guida, 2021, pp. 97-102; Kadioğlu, 2007; Berkes, 1998, pp. 309-31). Similarly, Mehmed Cavid bey, generally accepted as a liberal politician and later the finance minister of the ruling party, Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), was famous for his liberal economic thoughts published in economy journals (Guida, 2021, pp.96-97; Karaman, 2005, p. 91; Özavcı, 2012, p.142). Because Prince Sabahattin was forced to leave the country after the abolition of the sultanate, the development of the idea of liberalism in Turkey was deprived of this powerful voice in the new republican era. Some journalists, such as Ahmet Emin Yalman<sup>5</sup> (see Coşar, 2004, pp. 76-77) and Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın<sup>6</sup> (see Koçak, 2005), and politicians, such as Ahmet Ağaoğlu (Guida, 2021, pp.102-106; Kadioğlu, 2007; Coşar, 2004, pp. 75-76), attempted to articulate liberal views in economics and politics. However, because of the blatant statism of the 1930s and the rigid anti-liberalism of the ruling party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi–Republican People’s Party) at that time, the liberal views of intellectuals didn’t have any significant impact on the public (Guida, 2021, p.106). In parallel with the liberalization in the country after World War II, classical liberal ideas were publicly discussed again, and publications in favor of liberalism began to be seen in academic and intellectual circles.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, it is a fact that liberalism, in its classical sense, did not find wide-scale social support in Turkey. For example, at this point, it was emphasized that liberalism in Turkey ought to resort to a nationalist-conservative discourse to communicate effectively with society in general (Türk, 2005, p. 119).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the failure of the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP), the only political party that fully supports market liberalism in Turkey, was attributed to the inadequacy of emphasizing only liberal values, and it was argued that a liberal political program could be successful if it was blended with conservative values (Erdoğan, 2005, p. 35).

In this context, the divergences of classical liberal movements in Turkey seem interestingly similar. Hür Fikirleri Yayma Cemiyeti (The Association for Spreading the Free Ideas), experienced a significant disintegration following the 1950 elections, after a few years of activity. After the Democratic Party government, the separation manifested itself in religion, “secularism” and

5 At this point, Coşar further addresses that “His [Ahmet Emin Yalman] outwardly liberal stance was displayed not only in his writings, but also in his participation in the first meeting of *Dünya Liberaller Birliği* (World Union of Liberals) on 9–14 April 1945” (Coşar, 2004, p. 76, emphasis in original). See also Sadoğlu (2005, p. 307).

6 Regarding Yalçın, Koçak argues that “Yalçın, while defending the political liberalism against any kind of dictatorship, he did not refrain from defending democracy in Turkey” (Koçak, 2005, p. 252).

7 Two notable examples are the Turkish translations of “Road to Serfdom” by Friedrich von Hayek in 1948 and “Bureaucracy” by Ludwig von Mises (who is not a popular figure even today in Turkey) in 1947. Also “Hür Fikirleri Yayma Cemiyeti” was an important initiative aiming at promoting liberal ideas in the second half of 1940s (Guida, 2021, pp.107-108; Birinci, 2018; Sadoğlu, 2015).

8 At this point, DP’s conservative-liberal policies and the Republican People’s Party’s resistance should also be addressed.

“reactionism”, and there was a separation between the members. The two prominent figures of the association, Ali Fuad Başgil and Ahmet Emin Yalman, parted ways. While the association condemned the “reactionary movements” in 1951, Başgil opposed the association’s point of view (Sadoğlu, 2005, p. 308).<sup>9</sup>

However, with some exceptions, the idea of liberalism after the 1950s did not have a significant impact on public opinion until the 1980s (Denli, 2018, p. 59). Along with widespread ideas in favor of a market economy in the 1970s, the word liberalism started to be prominent in Turkey, especially in the discourse of Turgut Özal in the 1980s (Guida, 2021, p.106; Öniş, 2004, p. 120).<sup>10</sup> Also the early signs began to appear that the Kurdish issue and secularism would be the controversial topics among liberals at that time. In this regard, Atilla Yayla<sup>11</sup>, a leading figure among market liberals, states that Aydın Yalçın’s closeness to the official view and his preference for a Kemalist position on religious freedom and a liberal position on the Kurdish question caused him to leave this group (Yayla, 2003, pp. 82-83; Denli, 2011, p. 192, footnote 63; Denli, 2018, p. 24).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Birikim circle and Second Republicans also became influential with anti-Kemalist rhetoric (Denli, 2018, p. 24).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the two major institutions emerging in Turkey in favor of market liberalism were ALT and the Liberal Demokrat Parti (Liberal Democratic Party-hereafter LDP). Market liberals (ALT and LDP) differ from the above-mentioned cadres (despite their social liberal views) with their strong emphasis on the free market and capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Although LDP, as a political party, founded by the businessman Besim Tibuk, did not achieve notable success in the general elections, it had a relatively significant impact on Turkish political life compared to its actual vote base (Erten, 2005, p. 629).

Moreover, although it may not be considered liberal in all its aspects due to the composition of party elites, the short-lived Yeni Demokrasi Hareketi (New Democracy Movement) (Yılmaz, 1999, p. 185)<sup>14</sup>, the political initiative of big business representatives, promoting democratization and freedom discourse in the early 1990s, might be named in this context. Among these initiatives, ALT, which constitutes the subject of this study, has been able to continue its activities without any contraction. In a nutshell, the history of liberalism in the classical sense started with Ottoman modernization as emphasized throughout the article, and all the names mentioned are essentially classical liberal figures. In this sense, it is possible to talk about an uninterrupted classical liberal tradition in Turkey since the 1800s, which is generally defined as classical liberalism today. Most of the liberal movements that emerged in the period that started right after the Second World War are of a classical liberal character. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that there have been vivid interactions, albeit replete with crises and ruptures, between conservative

9 For points of divergence in The Association for Spreading the Free Ideas, also see (Guida, 2021, pp.107-108; Birinci, 2018, pp. 88-91; Demirel, 2015, pp. 111-114)

10 For further corroboration see (Denli, 2018, p. 59).

11 Atilla Yayla, the founding figure of ALT, states that he came from a traditionally anti-communist, right-leaning family and was right-wing and anti-communist during his university years. He also adds that he hated capitalism as a right-wing socialist in those years (Yayla, 2003, p. 73, p. 79).

12 There is an extensive literature on the variation within right and left liberal movements (Gürpınar, 2013; Köroğlu, 2012, pp. 127-131; Uslu, 2015, pp. 19-20).

13 Interviewee-B1 reiterates the similar point with regards to the variations within liberals. See also (Gürpınar, 2013; Köroğlu, 2012, pp. 127-131; Uslu, 2015, pp. 19-20).

14 For the similarities between LDP and YDH, and their relations to ALT and Second Republicans (Köroğlu, 2012, p. 130). Gürpınar (2013, pp. 209-214) stresses that it would be pertinent to claim that YDH can be identified as democrat not liberal due to its emphasis on identities and multiculturalism within the framework of positive freedoms rather than free market and negative freedoms.

and liberal segments of intellectuals and politicians until today. Secondly, a body of literature emphasizes that conservatism is embedded in liberalism with a specific reference to Hayek.<sup>15</sup> Both Coşar (1998, pp. 36-39; 2004) and Denli (2011, pp. 189-192; 2018, pp. 83-84) accentuate this point by addressing the theoretical influence of Hayekian conservatism in the establishment of ALT in its very early stages (see also Gürpınar, 2013, pp. 262-263).<sup>16</sup>

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### 2.1. The Trajectory of ALT: From Foundation to the 2000s

ALT was founded “informally” by a cluster of academics in 1992 (Yayla, 2003, p. 17; Özipek, 2005, p.620 ; also see Guida, 2021, p.108)<sup>17</sup> and became a legal entity as an association in 1994 (Yayla, 2003, p.18; Özipek, 2005, p.620).<sup>18</sup> As opposed to social democrats, ALT was formed on the principles of free-market capitalism and liberal democracy after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Özipek, 2005, pp.620-621, p.624).<sup>19</sup> In a general sense, ALT can be located somewhere between a scientific community and a social movement. At first, the association became known for its efforts to introduce the ideas of some famous classical liberal figures, especially Friedrich von Hayek, by publishing translations of their works (Yayla, 2003, p.18).<sup>20</sup>

ALT modeled itself on the UK-registered organization, *IEA* (Institute of Economic Affairs) (Yayla, 2003, p. 19; Coşar, 2004, p. 89). The founding figure of ALT, Atilla Yayla<sup>21</sup> added that this formation, besides various purposes, aims to “prepare the ground for a mental transformation in the direction of liberalism” and “operates literally as a third sector organization” (Yayla, 2003, p. 23). Moreover, in some cases, ALT did not restrain from being actively involved in political campaigns. For example, ALT launched petition campaigns to counter the lawsuits which were levied against Mustafa Erdogan

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15 For Hayekian conservatism see (Cliteur, 1990).

16 Nevertheless, within the scope of this study, conservatism denotes an amalgam of religious nationalism with strong connotations to traditionalism. Thus, it is rather distinct from the Anglo-Saxon conservatism generally attributed to Hayek.

17 As stated by Yayla, at the end of 1992, after the meeting of a group of nine people with liberal tendencies and “agreeing that liberal values and institutions should be promoted and disseminated intellectually in our country”, it was decided to establish ALT (Yayla, 2003, p. 17). As Yayla (2003, p. 18) emphasized, this informal formation organized Hayek symposiums in 1993 and the members of the community began to write in newspapers and magazines.

18 For a brief history of ALT (Guida, 2021, pp.108-109; Yayla, 2002, p. 48; Erdoğan, 2005, p. 36; Özipek, 2005).

19 Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to make a distinction between market or classical liberals and social liberals. Whereas both currents within liberalism previously supported the JDP against Kemalism tutelage under the aegis of military, left liberals are composed of intellectuals mostly from leftist origins and still keep some certain objections toward the capitalist market mechanism. Among those names are, Ali Bayramoğlu, Etyen Mahçupyan, Cengiz Çandar and Mehmet Altan who are also known as Second Republicans see (Ersoy & Üstüner, 2016). For further information on liberal intellectuals see (Gürpınar, 2013; Köroğlu, 2012, pp. 127-131; Uslu, 2015, pp. 19-20).

20 Bora (2017, p. 559) remarks the choice of word “capitalism” directly instead of the softer one “market”: “Atilla Yayla’s defense of capitalism in its literal meaning beyond market, taking the people who are not anti-capitalists avoids using the word into account, was a notable defiance”. See also (Coşar, 2004, p. 91)

21 Atilla Yayla states that he came from a traditionally anti-communist, right-leaning family and was right-wing and anti-communist during his university years. He also adds that he hated capitalism as a right-wing socialist in those years. See (Yayla, 2003, p.73 and p. 79).

due to his criticism of party closures in 2001 (Hukukçuya tazminat cezası, 2014) and Atilla Yayla's comments regarding Kemalism in 2006 (Atatürk'e 'Bu adam' sözüne, 2008). In both cases, ALT was actively involved in the defense of these two leading figures of the organization (Yılmaz, 2013, p. 247, p. 259). Moreover, many of the central figures of ALT actively participated in the *Yetmez ama Evet* campaign to amend the Turkish constitution of 1982. The ALT also printed a pamphlet in Kurdish in favor of the referendum campaign (Demirel, 2012, p. 87 footnote 11; Yılmaz, 2013, p. 268).

In the second half of the 1990s, the political atmosphere marked by the military's constant meddling provided an opportunity for ALT to become more widely known (Gürpınar, 2013, p. 266). The tension, due to the rapid rise of political Islam, led by the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party-hereafter WP) and the response to these developments by the military from 1995 which resulted in a so-called "soft" or "post-modern" coup in February 1997 when the leader of WP was forced to resign after a national security assembly meeting. Two of the founders of ALT, Atilla Yayla and Mustafa Erdoğan, took sides with WP against the military intervention and became publicly known for their works in newspapers and journals.<sup>22</sup>

Liberte Publications, a subsidiary of ALT, has published a wide range of translations and original works, ranging from classical liberalism to anarcho-capitalism. Along with book publications, it has also published two journals, *Liberal Düşünce* (Liberal Thought) (*Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, n.d.), and a 16-issue pro-market economy journal, *Piyasa* (Market) (*Piyasa dergisi*, n.d.).<sup>23</sup> Since 2000, ALT has also organized a large-scale annual academic conference, *Liberal Düşünce Kongresi* (Liberal Thought Congress) (*Liberal Düşünce Kongresi*, n.d.). In addition, a Liberty Award (*Özgürlük Ödülü*) was presented to selected figures from the business world<sup>24</sup>, journalists, politicians, and academics between the years 2002-2013. Activities such as these liberty award ceremonies were held on May 14<sup>th</sup>, a day with a symbolic meaning. On this day, the Democratic Party of Adnan Menderes came to power in Turkey in 1950 after the first free elections with a multi-party system in the republican era (*Hürriyet yemeği*, n.d.).

ALT has organized meetings, some with broad participation and some with a narrow focus, from the early 2000s on topics such as the Kurdish Question, the Alawi Question, and Freedom of Religion. In addition, seminars, education programs, and conferences focusing on freedom of speech, human rights, rule of law, entrepreneurship, and free-market economy have been held in universities all over the country with contributions from lecturers and students close to ALT (*Toplantılar, faaliyetler*, n.d.). Until 2016, the association cooperated intensively with foreign liberal institutions and carried out numerous educational and publishing activities in this context. The Mont Pelerin Society held a special meeting in 2011 in collaboration with ALT in Istanbul (*Mont Pelerin Cemiyeti Özel Toplantısı*, n.d.). The relationship with the German-based Friedrich Naumann Foundation, which had cooperated closely with ALT for many years, was terminated after 2016 due to its attitudes against the ruling JDP government during the Gezi Park events and after the coup attempt of July 15, as mentioned in an article by Atilla Yayla (Yayla, 2017).

## 2.2. ALT- JDP Relations in Perspective: Conservative-Liberal Rapprochement

The popularity of ALT was enhanced among conservative and religious people for its support of democracy against military tutelage in the February 28, 1997, military memorandum and for

22 For the role of "Liberal Düşünce" and the circle of ALT after the coup of "28 Şubat" see (Özipek, 2005, p. 626; Akın, 2018; Gürpınar, 2013, pp. 266-267).

23 For publications of ALT also see (Guida, 2021, p.108; Özipek, 2005, p.623).

24 One of these awards was presented to Besim Tibuk, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party in 2005.

opposing the pressures on Necmettin Erbakan and his pro-Islamist WP. During this period, conservative academics were generally introduced to ALT publications and its meeting facilities, and they accepted the association in recognition of the freedom it offered against the backdrop of oppression encountered at universities during the period of the 28 February postmodern coup.<sup>25</sup>

Although it has been stated in the main declarations of ALT and the statements of Atilla Yayla that they are not close to any political party, the fact that they took a stand in favor of religious groups in the process of the closure of the VP after the February 28 coup and the contact with many conservative academicians and writers generated the perception that ALT has close connections with JDP-led governments (Demirel, 2012, pp. 91-92). In fact, the formation of this perception is not totally unfounded. For example, JDP, after coming to power with a strong government in the 2002 elections, declared a ‘Conservative Democrat’ identity with a flamboyant congress in 2004. Almost the entire organization of this congress was planned and carried out by people with close relations to ALT (Demirel, 2012, p. 89).

Nevertheless, the democratic political climate started to worsen after the Gezi Protests in 2013. A vast literature on politics and democratization in Turkey has addressed the fact that the government frequently embarked on the “national will (*milli irade*)” rhetoric to highlight their legitimacy in politics. In so doing, the JDP cadres, however, often omitted the liberal character of modern democracy in their remarks by underscoring their status as the democratically elected government by the majority. This also coincided with the existing literature maintaining the *majoritarian understanding of democracy* which became prevalent in Turkish political life in post-Gezi Park Turkey (Başer & Öztürk, 2017, pp. 56-57; Bilgiç, 2018; Kubicek, 2016, pp. 123-124).<sup>26</sup>

The aforementioned political landscape has also had repercussions for market liberals. The so-called cooperation between JDP and market liberals started to be weakened in the wake of the Gezi protests. For example, shortly before the Gezi Protests, an important figure of the party (although he later corrected his statement) stated that they did not have to continue with their erstwhile allies, including liberals, in a live broadcast program he participated in 2013 (Babuşcu: Gelecek 10 yıl, 2013; Bora, 2017, pp. 564-567). Simultaneously, the debate over democratic backsliding found resonance in liberal circles as well. Accordingly, the centrifugal figures of market liberals voiced their concerns by stating that Turkey was going down an authoritarian path. Özpek confirms this point by stating that ALT’s unconditional submission to the JDP government arises from its elected status and the popular support it gained (Özpek, 2015, pp. 9-11).

### 2.3. ALT at a Crossroads: Schism in the Post-Gezi Period

Until around 2010, ALT appeared to be an integrated and robust movement that revolved around the charisma of Atilla Yayla. During this period, some of the JDP leaders’ discourses, which were interpreted as threats to individual freedoms, caused discomfort within ALT, but, apart from some individual criticisms<sup>27</sup>, there was no divergence leading to disintegration. The debates, which would lead to a serious break, started during the Gezi Park events that erupted in 2013. At first, some of the members and executives who were hesitant adopted a critical stance

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25 For a discussion of relationship between LDT circle and conservatives see (Demirel, 2012, pp. 89-90; Gürpınar, 2013, pp. 266-270; Denli, 2018, pp. 51-52).

26 The political system in Post-Gezi Turkey’s was conceptualized by means of different labels as well. For these labels see (Özbudun 2015; Esen & Gümüşcü, 2016) .

27 For a criticism from inside see (Erdoğan, 2013).



against the government while staying in ALT.<sup>28</sup> These criticisms were openly directed at the government's approach during and after the Gezi Park protests and ALT for its support of the government's stance. As a matter of fact, at ALT's widely attended congress in November 2013, there were heated debates concerning the Gezi events and, significantly, it was the last meeting of ALT before its disintegration.<sup>29</sup>

After the 17-25 December operations, as another watershed moment at the end of 2013, the whole agenda of the country was shifted in another direction, which caused a rift within ALT. A group of members went to a separate association in response to ALT's support of the government position.<sup>30</sup> Although the rupture took place during the Gezi Park and 17-25 December incidents, the leading figure of ALT, Atilla Yayla, defined the separation process in detail as related to "the Kurdish problem, the cases of democracy, the position of the conservative religious community and their politicians, the Gezi Park protests and finally the coup and massacres in Egypt" (Yayla, 2015, pp. 41-42).<sup>31</sup> The Journal of Liberal Thought also published a special issue on segregation in 2015 which can be considered as a self-assessment of ALT with regard to the divisions among market liberals.<sup>32</sup>

In the case of market liberals in Turkey, the discrepant frames over the external political milieu in Turkish politics caused a framing contest. Those frames, depicting distinct political realities, help legitimize the standing of each liberal community. For example, ALT, once the umbrella organization for market liberals, overly emphasizes the legitimacy of the democratically elected government and the vulnerability of the state against security threats. 3H M and FRA, on the other hand, address the infringement of human rights and the rule of law since the Gezi protests in Turkey. In the wake of Gezi, 3H M harshly criticized the excessive use of force against the protestors. Similarly, the founders of FRA, who, at that time, were in the ranks of ALT, did not align with the frame of ALT regarding the Gezi protests and the December 17-25 corruption probes. Subsequently, both 3H M and FRA also protested the massive purge targeting government officers and academicians in the wake of the July 15, 2016, coup attempt. In contrast, ALT kept emphasizing the magnitude of the security risk that the legitimate government faced.

Today, there are liberal initiatives outside of ALT and FRA in Turkey as well. Although 3H M had been in contact with ALT in various ways prior to the Gezi Park events, it is not regarded as a splinter of the ALT as it has its own annual congresses, publications, and educational activities.<sup>33</sup>

All in all, this research draws upon frame theory to explore the content of frames, employed by an assortment of market liberal organizations, causing division and the perceptions vis a vis the causes of frames disputes within market liberals based on interviews and publications of market liberals.

28 Bican Şahin, Chairman of ALT at that time, who later founded FRA, specifies in an article after the Gezi Park protests that JDP eliminated the grievances of Sunni people who constitute the majority of its own grassroots such as headscarf, imam hatip schools etc, but the problems of Kurds, Alawis and non-Muslims still persist (Şahin, 2013, p. 166).

29 The authors' observation in ALT Annual Conference 2013, Cappadocia, Turkey.

30 For the detailed analysis of fragmentation process after December 17-25 probes see (Uslu, 2015)

31 For an analysis of disintegration in regard to relations with the ruling party, see (Demirel, 2015, pp. 115-117).

32 See *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, no 77, 2015. Liber+ also published a special issue on the same topic. See. *Türkiye'de Liberalizm, Liber +*, Vol.1, No. 4, 2015.

33 It should also be noted that the first generation who established the 3H M had close acquaintance with Atilla Yayla and Mustafa Erdoğan. Both names supported 3H M in the initial periods of the organization. Aside from 3H M, there are newfound liberal organizations in Turkish intellectual life. Daktilo 1984, which was founded by a group of academics and professionals who declare themselves to be liberal-minded (Özpek, 2020) can be seen as another liberal formation on its way to institutionalization.

### 3. Schism and Framing Disputes in Organizations: A Theoretical Review

Factionalism and schism are common phenomena that occur in civil as well as governmental organizations, including political parties, non-state organizations, and professional corporations. Factions occur within political as well as (non-political) civilian milieus (Boucek, 2009, p. 461). Moreover, new oppositional factions in an organization are predisposed to turn into splinter organizations under certain conditions (Rochford Jr., 1989; Kretschmer, 2017). Factionalism generally precedes the schism, yet dissident sub-groups can be re-integrated and persist in an organization without causing a schism (Kretschmer, 2017, p. 404; Balser, 1997, p. 200). As a matter of fact, schism is the last stage of a process that concludes with a group exit process. Through this last stage, there are many other stops on the road to schism. That is why the schismatic process is of paramount importance to account for the disintegration of the organization (Dyck & Starke, 1999). In most cases, either ignoring or muting the dissent demanding change over the functioning of an organization is a prelude to the schism (Hirshman, 1970). The study of factionalism and schisms in organizations resides at an intersection of several disciplines, including political science, management, sociology, and even psychology. There is a sizable body of literature derived from these diverse disciplines that probe the reasons leading to the divisions within different types of political as well as non-governmental organizations. In the related literature, there are studies stressing external (environmental) factors together with internal factors that give rise to factionalism and the concomitant schism (Balser, 1997).

Factionalism and schism are two phenomena, which can be seen in a variety of groups, being explored within the framework of organizational theory (Balser, 1997). Group infighting over a particular issue opens “the identity contours of the group” (Ghaziani & Fine, 2008, pp. 53) to the debate and, occasionally, a new group identity emerges under favorable conditions as sub-group members have “conflicting ideas that were inconsistent with the status quo” (Dyck & Starke, 1999, pp. 803-804). Organizational cohesiveness depends on the extent to which an organization is adaptive to the challenges facing the collective identity (Gamson, 1996). There is a host of research connecting frame theory and collective identity. Frames help to create a group identity and mobilize the group (Aroopola, 2011). As Coles succinctly emphasizes, “collective identity is not a synonym for frames, but the two are correlated in intimate ways” (Coles, 1999, p.334). Snow and Benford delineate the different types of framings. According to them, diagnostic framing is pertinent to the “identification of the problem” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615; Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 200). Hallahan denotes the same process as “issue framing” with “different parties who vie for their preferred definition of a problem or situation to prevail” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 210). Individual frames as opposed to collective frames are generally related to “the most salient aspect of an issue.” (Chong & Druckman, 2007:101). This research stream can also be extended to a third approach by which frame theory is closely associated with the “collective action” of an assortment of social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000). Ellingson (1995) argues that there is a “dialectical” process where discourse might produce and also be produced by collective action.

Under the circumstances of a crisis, different factions’ adoption of different frames in relation to contested issues leads to a “frame dispute.” Those disputes can occur in different contexts as inter and intra-movement disputes due to controversy over “the content or the forms of the framing activity.” (Benford, 1993, p. 680). Moreover, frames disputes are closely associated with social movement theory in the sense that it focuses on the collective action of movements. Thus, different social movements such as environmental movements (Krogman, 1996), peace movement organizations (Coy & Woehrlé, 1996), and conservative Christian political movements

(Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009) are analyzed in terms of frame dispute in the related literature. It is conceivable that sometimes subgroups form as a result of the organizations' disputed "particular versions of reality" and might result in factionalism due to the identity conflict within the movements (Benford, 1993, p. 678; see also Hunt et al, 1994). Indeed, such disputes might have ramifications over the strategy of the movement as well. "Segments of a movement engage in an intra-movement contest over tactics and goals" and might pave the way for challenging the "dominant" frame of the movement (Zald, 1996, p. 270). This process in some of the literature is called a "framing contest" and is linked with an organizational strategy which is taken as the dependent variable (Kaplan, 2008). It should also be noted that those who refuse to rally around the dominant frame might opt to generate a "counter-frame" to challenge it as part of a framing contest (Chong & Druckman, 2013).

On the other hand, a stream of research links group "fault lines"<sup>34</sup> and frame disputes. According to this stream, internal framing disputes can be related to group fault lines, in this regard, it is argued that "more often than not frame disputes erupt between ideologically diverse wings of a movement." (Benford, 2013). Benford (1993), on the other hand, addresses the frame dispute between moderate and radical factions within and among movements. Wiktorowicz (2002), points out that "intra-movement divisions (such as hardliner softliner, conservative-liberal, old-young, ideologue-pragmatic) can create internal framing disputes". Haines (2006, as cited in Benford, 2013, p. 1) also stresses that membership profile plays an important role in framing disputes along with organizational culture and framing vocabulary.

#### 4. Methodology

The main topic of this interpretive case study is to investigate the underlying motives that caused the schism among market liberals in Turkey. The benefits of a single case study are manifold such as "explaining the presumed causal links", "describing an intervention and the real-life context" and "illustrating certain topics within an evaluation" (Yin, 2003, p. 15). Even though there has been some anecdotal evidence on the subject, no empirical research has been carried out. Hence, this research should be first considered as an exploratory case study in the sense that it is geared towards the discovery of the content of competing frames and causes of such a divergence.<sup>35</sup> With this object in mind, the data was drawn from three sources: semi-structured interviews, official publications of liberals (ALT in general) and secondary sources related to market liberals.

As the backbone of this research, we utilized semi-structured qualitative interviews with present and former members and associates of ALT. In doing so, we paid close attention to ensuring diversity in the sample at hand. To this end, we identified three main groups in terms of their relationship with the organization, especially after the fragmentation. The interviewees were determined regarding their relationship to the liberal movements mentioned in this study. To avoid selection bias, interviewees from disparate sub-groups were selected. The first group is still active members of ALT and has some sort of "decision-maker" role. As we will see in the interviews, they advocate the policies of the incumbent government on many points; these three participants were coded with the letter "A". The second group consists of those who decided to stay within ALT but have a different approach in terms of the attitude of the previous group and are

<sup>34</sup> Fault lines refer to gender, age, status, etc., among group members. See (Lau & Murnighan, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> This two-fold purpose of this case study can be conceptualized within the framework of theory building and testing, see (Ragin & Schneider, 2011).

more critical, especially of some specific aspects. These three interviewees were coded as “B”. The third group, on the other hand, can be defined as the opponents; they decided to leave ALT and became members of the recently founded new associations or to take a different path; that is, they did not become a member but share similar viewpoints and have a very critical attitude towards ALT and the government. These five interviewees were coded with the letter “C”. The reason that this group is higher in number is that some of them joined the new associations and some did not but still have a similarly critical attitude. A fourth group, consisting of three interviewees, was coded as “D” since their relationship with the movement was of a different nature than the others. This block includes veterans of ALT. They have been generally indifferent to the disputes and recent developments and have not taken a clear position as to the dispute within market liberals.

There were 14 interviews conducted between January 2018 and May 2019. Each interview lasted between 60 and 100 minutes and was recorded for accuracy. Moreover, interviews were transcribed to analyze using a computerized method with the help of MAXQDA software on qualitative data. The interviews were carried out in different places, that is, sometimes in cafes or offices. The length of them also varies, not because we asked additional questions but because some of the participants provided more details than the others. The interviews were semi-structured, which facilitated focusing on several points about the fragmentation with some narratives related to the schism being repeated. To identify the dominant narratives, the recurring themes residing within the text of interviews were garnered. These issues were later classified into codes and then into units of meaning; thus, they provided the data to understand the phenomenon. The details of the phenomenon will be discussed in the analysis. As stated, we conducted in-depth interviews with persons who experienced the schism within ALT. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by first coding the text and later by combining the codes into units of meaning.

To reach a robust conclusion on the divisions in ALT, the authors also utilized secondary sources as supplementary materials to understand the various narratives embedded in the debates that eventually led to a schism among market liberals of Turkey. Within the framework of this study, data on the related subject was enriched by employing not only semi-structured interviews but also periodicals, including *Liberal Düşünce*, which is the flagship publication of ALT, and many other secondary sources encompassing publications of the splinter organizations related to the issue.

## **5. Frames of Turkish Politics and Market Liberals in Post-Gezi Period: Data and Analysis**

In the next section, the dynamics of the disintegration will be discussed in the context of interviews and secondary sources including official chronicles of ALT and participant observations from annual congresses. In this respect, diagnostic frames were identified, which is democracy versus liberalism in terms of restriction of state power to elucidate the frame dispute causing inter and intra-movement schisms among market liberals. Secondly, the underlying causes of framing disputes were identified by scrutinizing the perception of market liberals.

### **5.1. Identifying the Frames: Securing Democracy versus Limiting State Power**

This study contends that the collision of two diagnostic frames over Turkish politics ended with a schism in ALT in the aftermath of the Gezi protests. However, it is also possible to observe that, prior to the Gezi protests, the discourse of the government, in general, caused disputes within the ALT. There was fervent debate casting doubt on the liberal tenets to be seen in the policies

of the government including statements on unisex student houses, the use of alcohol in the public realm, and abortion. These issues found resonance, especially at informal talks at the traditional ALT congress in Cappadocia in 2012.<sup>36</sup> The authors participated in the annual meetings of the ALT in 2013, 2016, and 2018. It was seen that the dialogues, to a large extent, mirrored the contemporary themes in Turkish politics. In this respect, the year 2013 was remarkable in that it was the first annual meeting after the Gezi protests and where the cleavage within ALT became visible (see Guida, 2021, p.109; Uslu, 2015). The debates in 2013 revolved around the political meaning of the Gezi protests, with some ALT members stating that the protesters were nothing more than radical leftist mobs. For others, the Gezi protests were within the limits of freedom of speech and demonstration, and the excessive police violence that ensued ought to be condemned.<sup>37</sup>

Before the incidents like the Gezi protests or the probes, ALT was able to act as an ‘umbrella’ organization and embody members from various circles. As a participant put it, the association lost this characteristic in time:

“...being part of ALT was very cool once. You could look onto Turkey from high above, you were beyond politics, you had principles, you could express yourself as you wished. Then, something happened, instead of looking at our principles we looked at the position of JDP; we considered if the things we said, were harmful to the JDP. So, its former cool position, its prestigious position diminished.” (Interviewee-B3)

However, the Gezi protests and some other incidents changed the discourse of ALT ending with a rift in the organization. This is certainly observable in the way of framing the very same incident and displayed the perceptions and attitudes of the two sides. Thus, incidents such as the Gezi protests or the coup attempt in 2016 proved to be ideal examples to illustrate the schism within liberals. Since the eruption of the Gezi protests, the predominant master frame in ALT’s decision-making circle was defending democracy and an elected government (as opposed to liberalism) by all means, including advocating the JDP government in the face of all types of critiques. The violation of human rights and the rule of law were swept under the carpet with the emphasis being on a government elected by the people through the ballot box. This point was criticized by circles within and outside the ALT, claiming that Turkey had lost its democratic credentials with a government stripped of any power limitations. For example, one of the founders of the 3H M confirms this point in his critiques vis-a-vis ALT by stating that;

“...these people were not liberals. They were conservative democrats who were at peace with the market economy. I can’t call them democrats because they perceive democracy merely as getting elected through the ballot box. Because liberals do not take democracy as a value unless there is liberalism... Ballot box democracy can form another tyranny.” (Interviewee-C4)

During the Gezi protests, ALT cadres counter-framed the protests as an illicit act targeting the democratically elected legitimate government. In other words, the Gezi protests were not considered within the scope of freedom of expression, and protestors were portrayed as unleashed mobs destroying private property and endangering public life as in this example:

“Taksim Solidarity, whose political agenda turned out to be beyond saving Gezi Park, resorted to any means available to them in an attempt to keep the unrest alive. Thousands of people proceeded to occupy Gezi Park. Taksim Square, too, was annexed to the original occupied site.” (Yayla, 2013, pp. 8-9).

36 The authors’ observation in ALT conference in Cappadocia in 2012.

37 For the causes, processes and consequences of Gezi protests see (Demirel-Pegg, 2018; Koca-Atabey, 2016).

Some members of the ALT also questioned the authority and legitimacy of the protestors against the government stating the following:

“...Well, the main reason for fragmentation among liberals was their stance between the legitimate and the illegitimate. Naturally, we have to side with the legitimate and refuse the illegitimate. This is one of the reasons for fragmentation.” (Interviewee-A1)

According to one of the founding members of FRA, the Gezi protests were nothing but a democratic reaction to excessive government interference. Here, we can clearly see how the same incident is framed from a completely different perspective as opposed to the framing of ALT members:

“I consider [Gezi] as a democratic movement... It was a movement where people were protecting their lifestyle. ...People saw that their lives were under threat. And I believe it was going to be a wonderful social movement if state violence had not taken it in another direction.” (Interviewee-C3)

In response to the master frame, the counter-frame of splinter organizations highlights the need for limitations of state power pursuant to universal human rights and liberal democratic standards. It was argued that, since the Gezi protest, the incumbent government has resorted to a more security-oriented approach and has exceeded the limits of its legal authority. This frame contests that domestic politics incited the inter- and intra-movement schismatic process triggered by the Gezi protests and aggravated by the 17- 25, December 2013 Corruption Probes and the July 15 coup attempt.

The Gezi protests had certain ramifications on the internal coherence of ALT and made already existing disagreements more visible within ALT. In other words, it planted the seeds of discord, which would incite factionalism and schism in the following years. As such, this initial disagreement caused a break-up shortly thereafter. In the wake of the 17-25 December corruption probes, a new liberal association, FRA was founded as a splinter group of the ALT (Demirel, 2015, p. 107). Even though FRA was not founded immediately after the Gezi protest, it is often stated that FRA was a fallout of the Gezi protests. As one of the interviewees put it:

“If you ask me, the real break was the break of FRA. Although many people relate the break to 17-25 December, the unrest started with the Gezi Park incidents.” (Interviewee-C5)

A further critical juncture was the 17-25 December probes which were assessed and framed from two different perspectives that are from the prism of security as an assault on democracy by leading figures from ALT. They claimed that the corruption case was only a pretext to topple Erdoğan and his companions. They further stressed that a parallel structure had illicitly captured the state apparatus, and therefore, urgent security measures had to be taken. As one of the ALT members aptly put it:

“They said, e.g., if there is corruption, the son of the minister must be arrested. But they didn’t see the Gülen movement behind it. As if they don’t know the history of Turkey. When was the son of a minister in Turkey ever treated like an ordinary citizen? ... They acted as if there were impartial judges and policemen. They turned a blind eye to it, and that is because of their antipathy to the government.” (Interviewee-B1)

Although the dissenters within market-liberal circles acknowledge the charges against the “parallel structure”<sup>38</sup>, they called for the rule of law, accountability, and protection of basic rights, which reflects the counter-frame in the matter. For example, after December 17-25, some leading

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38 “Parallel structure” refers to a religious movement led by a preacher of Turkish descent, Fethullah Gülen, located in Pennsylvania, USA. The Turkish state designated Gülen and his supporters as a terrorist organization for plotting the July 15 coup attempt.

figures of FRA underlined the necessity of investigating corruption claims. As one of the founders of FRA puts it, there was the demand that those being accused of corruption charges ought to be investigated and, if necessary, stand trial for their offenses regardless of the fact that the “parallel structure” had exposed these offenses (Şahin, 2015).

A further case that had implications for market liberals was the July 15 failed coup. The main argument made by ALT toward the coup attempt was that it was military interference in the civil realm and the security of the state apparatus. In this regard, one of the leading members of ALT drew attention to the dissident liberal group’s failure to understand the severity of the situation:

“We should consider things in their own context, for example, the wrongdoings after July 15. Why wasn’t there a state of emergency on 14 July but one on 20 July? A serious issue came up. How do we solve this problem? They don’t have any solutions.” (Interviewee-A1)

In contrast to ALT, both FRA and 3H M emphasize the consequence of the coup attempt by stating that the July 15 attempt further exacerbated the situation in an already malfunctioning democracy in Turkey. They also mentioned the infringement of basic rights during the state of emergency. As one of the founding members of the FRA emphasized:

“Yes, this is a coup attempt... What followed was claimed to be done within positive law, but a rule of law doesn’t mean just positive law. So, they arrest journalists; you want to speak about freedom of speech and the press, they call it terrorism and consider it a matter of positive law. Therefore, although they claim to be within the rule of law, I think the borders are too blurred and there are too many violations. No matter what the threat is, no act can be legitimized. Law is needed especially during extraordinary times.” (Interviewee-C3)

## **5.2. Two Causes of a Framing Dispute: Ideological Backgrounds and Interpersonal Patronage Networks**

To understand the fragmentation, we further need to consider the members and participants of ALT and how they actually vary from each other. The interviews revealed the typology of participants and members of ALT, pointing out that, especially during the second half of the 90s and early 2000s, people from various backgrounds were active in the association and that this changed over time. Therefore, a few aspects need to be discussed in this context both to understand ALT itself and how it changed and was affected by developments in the broader context. These aspects mainly revolve around the backgrounds of the participants and members and also their patronage networks. As one interviewee highlights, ALT members came from various sociological backgrounds and ALT was able to attract and host them under one “roof”:

“If we go back to the beginning, many people from conservative circles came to ALT after the 28 February coup in search of freedoms. ... But one needs to say that “white Turks” were also included; one could feel that people with a leftist, nationalist, Alawi background were also drawn towards ALT.” (Interviewee-D1)

Despite this sociological diversity, ALT holds a more conservative position as stated by many participants; the reason for this is often explained by the fact that its founders came from a conservative background. Accordingly, one participant maintains that the aim to attract more conservative people was present from the very beginning since the leading figures were the ones who would feel the need for it:

“ALT had an aim to address conservatives in particular... Both Atilla Yayla and Mustafa Erdoğan believed that, if there is a chance for liberal values in Turkey, it would be through ordinary people, not Kemalists.” (Interviewee-B2)

For example, a former member of ALT and one of the founders of the newly established FRA states that “Although there are people like me, who come from a leftist cultural background, within ALT the majority is culturally conservative. This certainly has sociological and historical reasons. The intellectual background of the founders also led to the conservative-liberal path of the association...” (Interviewee-C3)

Another interviewee even associated this aspect with their attitude towards liberalism stating that: “I can say the following: I don’t think that those born into conservative families really understand what liberalism is. I don’t believe that they were able to internalize it.” (Interviewee-C2)

Nevertheless, although conservative tunes have prevailed in ALT, it does not mean that it had been completely homogenous at least until recently. One of the repeated themes in interviews related to the emergence of diverse frames is the altering composition of ALT over time. Some critiques assert that the liberal core of the organization has been dissolved and ALT has become a more conservative-oriented movement. In other words, the transformation in organizational structure caused division leading to different diagnostic frames vis-a-vis the post-Gezi period JDP government.

Moreover, the composition of the organization, in terms not only of decision-makers but also members and active participants, drastically changed following the debates over the Gezi protests. The last ‘well-attended’ conference with attendees and guests from diverse backgrounds was in 2013 when heated discussions were held by members over the acceptability of the politics of the JDP in the post-Gezi period. As one of the former members confessed:

“I observed that academicians who often came to ALT activities in the early 2000s distanced themselves. Some of them maintained their contact in a loose way, but I think it wasn’t possible for them to experience an atmosphere where people from all different backgrounds, leftists, conservatives, and liberals, come together.” (Interviewee-D2)

The second factor which triggered the framing dispute among market liberals was pertinent to the changing nature of the state-civil society relationship in Turkey. The instrumentalization of civil society has been a strategy employed extensively during the JDP rule. This means that pro-government civil society organizations and their members have enjoyed preferential treatment as a result of their cooperation (Yabancı, 2019; Doyle, 2017).

To put it more clearly, the blurring of the border between state and civil society caused growing interpersonal patronage networks between ALT and the government, and this fact was crucial in the growing rift between market liberals. As one ALT member contends that even though there is no evidence showing that ALT was directly funded by government bodies, it was generally understood that some members had and still have intimate ties with the incumbent government since these members have taken up administrative positions in bureaucracy and academy.<sup>39</sup>

“But this I can say, I believe that their personal prosperity led to the defense of their corrupt democratic ideas. At present, many people have gained material opportunities. These are not the type a businessman would get, but for an academician from the countryside (*taşralı*), it is attractive. The fact that ALT decision-makers are not working in the private sector affects their freedom. If they were acting independently from the state, they might be a bit more critical.” (Interviewee-C4):

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39 One can also see the transition in terms of invited speakers to the annual meetings since 2013 as compared to earlier years. Following the conference in 2013, the invited speakers of events and critical members of the association were those who were affiliated with the bureaucratic cadres and political circles within the JDP ranks and anti-government voices were rare as guest speakers in ALT events.



On the other hand, though some highlight the relationship between the government and ALT, similar criticisms of the other side are expressed within ALT. For example, one of the present leading members of ALT claims that the reasons for the fragmentation and the opposition to JDP are due to expectations that could not be met:

“...It is important that we do not transform our personal problems into public issues. Some who were categorically against the JDP also had personal problems with the party. Either they did not get what they expected, or they obtained it but were later marginalized.” (Interviewee-A1)

This is similar to a point reiterated by a former participant who is no longer associated with the ALT, and chose to become an independent liberal:

“At present, it is true that ALT seems to have joined JDP and is taking advantage of the space it has opened up. But it would be an over-generalization to claim it for all liberals.” (Interviewee-D2)

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

Since the eruption of the Gezi protests, the rift between liberals has widened to the degree that they went through inter-movement and intra-movement splits in the following years. There is no doubt that ALT, as an umbrella organization, had been the epicenter of the political debates among market liberals during the JDP period. Even though there had been some dissatisfaction over the disruptive policies of the JDP prior to the Gezi protests, the Gezi protests were the breaking point providing a context by displaying the discontent that constituted irredeemable divisions and subsequent disintegration among market liberals in ALT. This rift between market liberals widened in the following years with the 17-25 December Probes and the July 15 coup attempt. During the Gezi protests, different frames of liberal movements constituted contradictory images and meanings that eventually led to fractionalization and schism. The first inter-movement framing dispute over the political environment in Turkey was with 3H M. Whereas 3H M was the most vocal organization in their critiques vis-a-vis ALT, it should also be noted that intra-movement tensions also arose within ALT. Such a backstage dispute concomitantly led to the foundation of FRA following the 17-25 December probes. The founders of FRA departed from ALT as a splinter organization in due course over the intra-movement discrepancies on the interpretation of the 17-25 December probes. The third instance which deepened the rift between ALT and other liberal movements was the July 15 coup attempt after which a record number of civil servants, journalists, and academicians were either purged or detained. In all of these three cases, ALT emphasized the threats toward the legitimate government, whereas both 3H M and, later on, FRA focused on the transgression of fundamental human rights and freedoms in Turkey. From a broader perspective, ALT merely highlights the current situation as a state of exception where the Turkish state was circumscribed by so-called terrorist organizations. FRA and 3HM, on the other hand, underline the extensive human rights violations and backslide in the democracy of Turkey. These clashing frames led to inter-movement and intra-movement schisms among market liberals.

This research argues that the main dynamic which led to the schism within market liberals is the escalating frame dispute between these organizations, ALT, 3H M, and FRA. The clashing frames became prominent as a different strand of market liberals put diverse emphasis on the cause and consequences of the political developments starting with the Gezi period. Within the framework of this research, an attempt was made to explore the frame disputes among market liberals, particularly at three critical junctures, the Gezi Protests, the 17-25 December Probes, and the July 15 coup attempt, by putting ALT at the center. Employing framing theory with a specific

emphasis on framing disputes, this paper demonstrates that diverse constructions of political realities cause divisions among market-liberal movements. Accordingly, the central frames were identified by looking at the content of narratives by market liberals, securing democracy versus restriction of state power.

Yet another question that we attempted to answer in this research is the determinants of the framing disputes, which led to the schism in ALT. Based on empirical evidence, mostly interviews, first, it was argued that framing disputes were predicated by the socio-cultural backgrounds of liberals in that some had a more traditional/conservative stance and others were more secular/liberal. In retrospect, it can be contended that the clash between conservative and liberal circles, as a deep sociological fault line in Turkish politics, emerges as one of the root causes of the divisions between liberals given the history of liberalism in Turkey. In other words, the predominance of conservative figures in the decision-making processes at ALT stood out as a crucial determinant. This fact seems to have affected their position vis-a-vis the policies of the incumbent government and was critical in the fragmentation. Thus, it can be argued that individual-level parameters played a substantial role in foregoing fragmentation. In this context, the partition of market liberal movements in Turkey's political life seems to have interestingly similar patterns. The dissolution of Hür Fikirleri Yayma Cemiyeti (*The Association for Spreading the Free Ideas*)<sup>40</sup> and the disengagement of Yayla and Erdoğan from the *Yeni Forum* that was led by Aydın Yalçın in the 1980s attest to this claim (see Yayla, 2003, pp. 84-86).

Second, according to interviewees, interpersonal patronage networks between government elites and some ALT members led to either unrestricted support toward the ruling party or the members' self-censorship against the government's arguably anti-democratic maneuvers. On the other side of the ledger, some interviewees, mostly the remnant members of ALT, claimed that the dissident liberals, such as FRA, shored up by international NGOs or illegal groups due to their anti-government stance, form an outsource patronage network. Consequently, this research suggests that the framing dispute among liberals was not based on their distinct interpretation of liberalism informed by theoretical debate. These findings also have implications for the literature on framing disputes with its emphasis on two underlying factors, the growing conservative-liberal divide and the entrenched interpersonal patronage networks causing the dispute. Nevertheless, this research is predicated on the perceptions of the liberal circles regarding the framing dispute following the Gezi Protests. Hence, it is solely based on the perceptions of market liberals who were encapsulated within the scope of this research. Nevertheless, recurring patterns in the collected data demonstrate that the phenomenon was not individually perceived or observed but was merely a common experience for all of them.

Even though earlier literature provides anecdotal descriptions with regards to the liberal-conservative divide and ALT's intermingling with the government (Demirel, 2015: 113-114)<sup>41</sup>, this study offers not only a theoretical framework in terms of a frame dispute but also provides empirical evidence based on a laborious field study. This research also bears some broader implications for shedding light on the unique underlying factors leading to such a frame dispute. First of all, this research reveals how underlying structural conditions shape framing processes. Along with group fault lines, in our case, conservative versus liberal and cooptation of the third sector through interpersonal networks, are another crucial factor in the inter and intra-organizational

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40 For an earlier emphasis on this point, see (Demirel, 2015, pp. 113-114).

41 Nevertheless, it should be noted that Demirel does not fully concur with the relevance of these two factors.

division. The second point raised here also illustrates how the flawed nature of state-civil society relations<sup>42</sup> in hybrid regimes might emerge as a vital denominator for frame disputes. Addressing this point might also be considered an original contribution to the literature of factionalism.

Obviously, market liberals in Turkey underwent an unprecedented process recently. New movements relying on the principles of market liberalism proliferated in post-Gezi Turkey. As one member of ALT admits, “Liberals are not under the roof of ALT anymore. They are in an office or in their own rooms, and ALT seems to be limited to a number of academicians.” (Interviewee-B3) Nevertheless, this fragmentation should not be thought of as a crisis but rather as an opportunity for the proliferation of new liberal perspectives. There can be no doubt that these new organizations have the potential to contribute to public debate under severe conditions unfavorable to civil society in Turkey.

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**Ethics Committee Approval:** The authors do not have an ethics committee approval for this article since this research dates back to 2018, when the ethics committee approval was not mandatory.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Author Contributions:** Conception/Design of Study- H.B.A, M.C.Ö., S.A.; Data Acquisition- H.B.A, M.C.Ö.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- H.B.A, M.C.Ö., S.A.; Drafting Manuscript- H.B.A, M.C.Ö., S.A.; Critical Revision of Manuscript, H. B.A, M.C.Ö., S.A.; Final Approval and Accountability- H.B.A, M.C.Ö., S.A.

**Conflict of Interest:** One of the authors (HBA), has been a member of the Association of Liberal Thought, an organization mentioned in the study, without any financial interest.

**Grant Support:** The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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42 For civil society-state relations see (Yabancı, 2019; Doyle, 2017).

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