

## Media Systems and Media Capture in Turkey: A Case Study

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### Abstract

This article attempts to explain the current situation of the Turkish media system through the media systems approach as a case study with special attention to the concept of media capture. We propose that the Turkish media system’s shift is heavily influenced by media capture. We associate four of Hallin and Mancini’s media systems concepts related to the effects of media capture in the Turkish media system shift: rise of political parallelism, erosion of journalistic professionalism (ethics), controlling role of the state, and government-friendly ownership concentration. In explaining the shift from a pluralist polarised to captured media in Turkey, we acknowledge the potential for new, independent, and alternative media to emerge. The article also comments that the potential reason for this shift from a captured liberal to a captured media in Turkey is the climate of fear that has allowed successive governments in Turkey to attempt media capture. In general, this article attempts to provide insight into the current relationship between media and politics in Turkey.

### Keywords

journalism; media capture; media systems; political parallelism; Turkey

## 1. Introduction

In our analysis of the recent shifts in the Turkish media system, especially since 2011, we will follow a roadmap. In Section 1, we explain Hallin and Mancini’s media systems model, explain the relevant concepts like political parallelism and media pluralism, and point out similarities with the Turkish case and differences in other countries’ media system case studies. We also explain why the concept of liberal media capture is relevant and complementary to understanding the reasons why the media system shift occurred in the

Turkish case. Section 2, describes the historical and current state of Turkey's media system, highlighting a shift from a previously identified Mediterranean model to a captured media system. Here, putting Hallin and Mancini's concepts to the test in the Turkish case, we look at how Turkish media's shift parallels the increase in political parallelism and erosion of the journalistic profession. In Section 3, we look at the result and discuss what happens after the shift. We conclude by reiterating that even when there is a high degree of political parallelism, an eroding sense of journalistic professionalism, and the controlling role of the state in the media system, there is still potential for alternative/independent media to emerge and disrupt the captured media system.

### **1.1. Media Systems Theory Research and Its Relevance in the Turkish Context**

In 2004, Hallin and Mancini wrote a book on Western European and North American media systems within a political framework. They used the term "model" as a means of comparing media systems. As the authors later reiterate, this approach was not intended to be a prescriptive framework but open to interpretation and remodeling based on the different contexts outside Western Europe and Northern America (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 6). This approach is further illustrated in Hallin and Mancini's (2012) edited volume, in which the authors explained that they wanted to avoid a universalizing approach. The authors also point out that to break the dominance of the West in global academia, more comparative interpretations are needed, questioning and revising their very own model (Hallin & Mancini, 2012, p. 1). In fact, the authors state that their model may experience "significant modification" when comparing media systems beyond the Western media (Hallin & Mancini, 2013, p. 17). Indeed, in their edited 2012 volume, they include case studies from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The authors state that the choice of the countries was random and necessarily excluded some other media systems worldwide, such as Turkey (Hallin & Mancini, 2012, p. 2).

In their original work, Hallin and Mancini present three models: the Mediterranean or pluralized polarised model, the North/Central European or democratic corporatist model, and the North Atlantic or liberal model. The authors stress the later development of capitalist industrialization and political democracy in Southern European countries and their relatively late liberalization of the press compared to Western countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 89). The authors point out that the French media system at the time was a borderline case between polarised pluralist and democratic corporatist models. This approach also inspires our case study as the Turkish media system has now shifted to such an in-between borderline case. Here, the term polarised pluralist, which they use to define the Mediterranean model, owes its existence to political scientist Giovanni Sartori, when there are political parties present but on extremely different ends of the spectrum. Hallin and Mancini adapt this concept when classifying countries' media using a media systems conceptual framework with four dimensions. These dimensions include media market structure, political parallelism, professionalization of journalism, and the role of the state. Similarly, and in addition to the four dimensions related to media systems, there are also five dimensions of the political contexts of media systems. These include the role of the state, democracy type (majoritarian vs. consensual), type of pluralism (individual vs. organized), degree of rational lawmaking/legal authority, and degree of pluralism (polarized vs. moderate).

Of the four dimensions they use to describe media systems, political parallelism is a dimension relevant to our analysis of the Turkish case. It refers to the idea that "media in some countries have distinct political orientations" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 27). The authors present five indicators to assess the extent of political parallelism. First is the degree to which media reflects different political orientations and the

orientation and professional practice of journalists. Second is the institutional links between media and political parties. Third is the engagement of media workers as political actors. Fourth is whether the career advancement of media personnel depends on political affiliations, and fifth is the media audiences' partisanship (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 26–33). A high degree of political parallelism does not necessarily point to a compromised democracy. Polarized pluralist media systems, for instance, are characterized by a lively public sphere, high voter turnout, strong citizen-party attachment, and political participation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 281). A shift towards a more illiberal and controlled media can occur for such a media system if its political system changes, such as transitioning from a parliamentary system to a presidential system, as is the case for Turkey.

Intersecting with this media system dimension, the political context dimension of media pluralism is an important political variable. Media pluralism determines the availability of various media outlets that can channel differences of opinion on political matters. Based on this, a media system can have a high or low degree of internal or external pluralism. Internal pluralism means a plurality of voices, analyses, and expressed opinions and issues. External pluralism is a plurality of media outlets, types of media (print, radio, TV, or digital), and the coexistence of privately owned media and public service media (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Hence, internal pluralism is the plurality of voices, opinions, and analyses in media systems. It is a media system's ability to cover different opinions and perspectives. External pluralism is the coexistence of different and diverse types of media/ownership (private/state), which means covering different opinions and perspectives. Mancini mentions that the concept of political parallelism is less clear than that of press/party parallelism (Mancini, 2012, p. 271). Compared with party/press parallelism, what seems to be missing in political parallelism is the party itself, and in the Turkish case, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its affiliates aim to control media content (Akser, 2018; Topak, 2017; Yıldırım et al., 2021).

The second important dimension is the degree of professionalization of journalism. Here, professionalization refers to the continuum of independent to instrumentalized journalism. Do the journalists have a degree of autonomy, or are they controlled by media bosses? Is there a development of distinct professional norms and rules, such as ethical principles, and a means to enforce them? Are the journalists oriented toward public service rather than the interests of individual politicians? The idea of media instrumentalization used in *Comparing Media Systems* was intended as “the control of the media by outside actors—parties, politicians, social groups or movements or economic actors seeking political influence—who use them to intervene in the world of politics” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 37). Instrumentalization and media capture discussed next are seen as the negative aspects of political parallelism as they undermine the liberal and pluralist tendencies in the Mediterranean model.

The third dimension is the role of the state. This dimension stresses the power the political system has in shaping the structure and functioning of a media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 41–44), “but there are considerable differences in the extent of state intervention as well as in the forms it takes” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 41). Hallin and Mancini use the following variables to cover this fourth dimension: Is there censorship or other types of political pressure? Are certain media outlets endowed with the government's economic subsidies? Who owns/controls ownership of media and telecommunication regulatory agencies? How restrictive are regulations for the media, such as laws and licensing? Is the state the “primary definer” of news? Alongside the change in a country's political system, media capture allows for a shift towards media control and instrumentalization.

Media capture is a government's control of media outlets and the direct dictation of the content by the political elites in power due to regulatory or financial takeover of media organizations. Media capture implies a direct manipulation of news through suppression or even fabrication of false news, and in a more indirect manner through biased reporting (Prat, 2015, p. 669).

The specific type we are looking at is liberal media capture. The concept of the "captured-liberal media model" has been developed through the research of Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez (2014) in the context of media in Latin America. In their landmark study, *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*, the authors focused on media ecosystems in Latin America that included Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. In this context, they proposed the captured-liberal media model, defined as "liberal" as "it keeps the formalities of a predominant commercial media system," and they defined captured media as "due to its late development under historical circumstances that made them dependent on governments and public funding, it subordinated the media system from the start" (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014, p. 59). Hence, the case studies of Latin American countries revealed a similar situation to that of the Turkish media concerning the captured-liberal model. In this model, there are core aspects of the political system that affect the media, such as "the degree of closeness between new ruling politicians and traditional media groups" and "the historical trend toward clientelism" (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014, p. 59). This also exists in the Turkish case, as discussed in Section 2. Similarly, two core fields of the media system affected by the political system are "low quality of regulatory efficiency" and "high degree of interference on the media's watchdog role," which persist in the Turkish case (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014, p. 59).

There is further empirical evidence and literature on media capture and how it expanded over the last decade across Europe. Enikolopov and Petrova (2015) examine the evidence on the effect of media capture on the content of media outlets. They identify the methods governments and other special interests use to control media, along with the determinants of media capture and the factors that affect the likelihood of media capture (Enikolopov & Petrova, 2015). They present evidence on the effects of captured media on people's behavior, as well as the effects of independent media in a captured environment, all of which are relevant in the Turkish case. Direct provision of money from the government through government-sponsored advertising is one of the methods used to ensure that media coverage is favorable to incumbent politicians (Di Tella & Franceschelli, 2011).

Media regulation is another method governments use to affect media coverage, where defamation laws are important determinants of media coverage of corruption in Mexico (Stanig, 2015). Media capture can lead to a situation in which some politicians have abundant access to broadcast time while others rarely have the same opportunity (Starr, 2004). In Italy, politicians from the Berlusconi party had a higher probability of appearing on public TV when Berlusconi was in power (Durante & Knight, 2012). Commercialization of the news is an important factor that affects newspaper content in China. Their results imply that newspapers that depend more on commercial revenues and are less directly controlled by the Communist Party are less likely to report low-level corruption (Qin et al., 2018). Increased income inequality is associated with lower media freedom and this effect is driven by the incentives of rich elites to manipulate public opinion and prevent redistribution (Petrova, 2008).

Another determining factor for media capture is the regime's stability, as governments facing threats to their power have stronger incentives to control the media (VonDoepp & Young, 2013). A number of empirical works

demonstrate that captured media can have a significant effect on people's behavior. For example, exposure to Serbian radio increased voting for extreme Croatian nationalist parties and open expression of nationalism (DellaVigna et al., 2014). In a recent example, Faris et al. (2023, p. 1) reveal in their study of the media of Iraqi Kurdistan that "media regulatory authorities and governmental bureaucracy use both formal and informal instruments and practices at their disposal to regulate press freedom" which is similar in Turkish government's attempts to control media through regulatory practices.

## 2. The Media System in Turkey

### 2.1. A History of Turkish Media System: Oscillating Between Relative Freedom and Total Control

Hallin and Mancini's 2004 book and their 2012 edited volume further inspired our case study, especially the case studies on Poland and Brazil in the latter volume. For example, the case study on Poland refers to the country's "Italianization/Mediterraneanization" (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2011). This is a useful frame of analysis in comparing historical shifts within a decade in other countries like Turkey, as the Turkish media system is very much described as fitting into the Mediterranean model (Kaymas, 2011). The Polish case study by Dobek-Ostrowska (2011) is built on previous conceptualizations and frameworks of the "Italianization of media" by Goban-Klas (1997) and the "Mediterraneanization" concept developed by Jakubowicz (2008). Goban-Klas explains the Italian media system through these four qualities:

State control over the media such as direct control over TV and indirect control over the press, political party influence on the media coverage and how the media organizations are structured, that there is a high degree of integration of the media and political elites, and that the ethical divisions exist between journalists. (Goban-Klas, 1997, p. 40)

By studying case studies such as those in Poland, we can explain in Section 2.2 how the Turkish media system also shows a shift in some of these qualities today. Furthermore, Jakubowicz's analysis of the Mediterraneanization of Polish media points out that such media systems share qualities similar to those of Mediterranean countries. Countries such as Poland also went through recent democratization coming out of the Soviet era in the 1990s. Similarly, as in the Polish case study, Turkey also went through the EU process and democratization; there is uneven economic development with periodic financial crises and a weak rational-legal authority with a strong direct influence of the state.

De Albuquerque (2011) applies the media systems method to the Brazilian media system. He identifies two points where the Brazilian media system can update Hallin and Mancini's theory. The first is the existence of central and peripheral media systems to the extent that they define themselves concerning foreign models. The second point is the importance of the system of government in determining the media system model, that is, whether it is presidential or parliamentary. This is an important variable that explains some traits of the relationship between the media and the political agents (De Albuquerque, 2011, p. 72). Both of these points also help us interpret the Turkish media system.

When we even attempt to frame Turkish media along these terms, we start with the history of the media system in Turkey. Media in Turkey did not come from the grassroots bourgeoisie but started with an official gazette in the 1800s (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010, p. 523). Then, the relative liberalization of politics during the

empire and after the declaration of the Republic in 1923 witnessed the emergence of a semi-autonomous independent press that sometimes attempted to criticize the government and keep it in check (Akser & Baybars, 2012).

When we put Hallin and Mancini's media markets (first dimension) into a test for Turkish media, we recognize a pattern in the media systems structure of media markets. The structure of media markets is informed by the growth of a mass circulation of print press. To classify the Turkish media system under the polarised pluralist model, Hallin and Mancini mention certain variables to evaluate the qualities of media systems. These qualities match the Turkish media system since its inception. Turkish print and broadcast media moved from a government-operated to a more liberal model in the 20th century and later went back to a more government-controlled model (captured-liberal) in the 21st century (Karlıdağ & Bulut, 2021). Turkish newspapers were few in the early years of the Republic (1920s–1930s) but proliferated with the end of WWII, especially with the introduction of multi-party politics and the change of governments through free elections in 1946 (Adaklı, 2009).

Between the 1980s and 2000s, there were high newspaper circulation rates when newspaper circulation reached the millions for some newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Sabah*, and *Tan*, and daily readership rates of newcomer newspapers like *Radikal* and *Sözcü* still remained high through the 1980s–2000s (Öncü, 2010). With the internet and digitization of newspapers, along with pressures on the critical editors and post-Gezi Park repression of media, the circulation numbers of some of these newspapers plummeted. Here, a dimension Hallin and Mancini failed to predict was how transformations in media technologies could lead to the formation of new aspects of media, such as the rise of online independent media as a counterbalance. All of these above-mentioned newspapers now have online versions and social media accounts where they can reach millions while the print versions remain in the thousands of sales (Yeşil, 2018).

The newspaper-readership relationship aspect and the appeal for mass-orientation vs. elite aspect have existed in Turkey since the 1940s. The pundit/columnists were usually the chief editors of newspapers like Nadir Nadi (*Cumhuriyet*), Sedat Simavi (*Hürriyet*), and Abdi İpekçi (*Milliyet*). These individuals not only commanded huge influence in the politics of the country but they were also themselves journalists and sometimes owners of the daily newspapers (Topuz, 2003). The shift of ownership to media moguls who had interests in other businesses led to conglomeration and de-unionization in Turkish media (Yeşil, 2016). Another point the authors make is about the relative importance of newspapers and TV as news sources. The importance of news via print newspapers has waned and shifted to TV news since the 1980s. There was a period of relatively harmless coexistence in the 1980s and 1990s, but the balance shifted towards the consumption of TV news (and later social media/mobile news; Polat et al., 2018).

Since the 1980s, media moguls have entered the media business, and those who own both print and TV news outlets are in a position to shape the public agenda for or against the government of the time. The sensationalist headlines of the 1990s that toppled governments motivated successive AKP and Erdoğan governments to gain greater control over the media (Yanardağoğlu, 2021).

Another quality in the Turkish media system is the existence of strong national newspapers due to the centrist nationalist orientation of the Turkish political and administrative structures. The degree of separation between sensationalist mass press and quality press existed to a degree until the 1980s when dailies such as *Cumhuriyet*,

*Milliyet*, and *Hürriyet* were considered more serious newspapers, and *Tan* was more sensationalist (Barutçu, 2004). This separation is no longer clear as major newspapers and TV news outlets pump out sensationalist news to avoid hard political and critical discussions unfavorable to the current Turkish government (Bek, 2004). In stark contrast, through the 1990s, Turkey had journalists working for privately owned media (outside direct state interference) who were able to question the government's agenda, corruption, and undemocratic actions. This period featured a plurality of voices—newspapers, private TV channels, and columnists like Can Dündar—who later became news anchors for a range of TV channels that were able to make monthly programs that criticized the Turkish government between 1995 and 2016. After government interference, Can Dündar lost his job and had to live abroad as a political refugee (Dündar, 2016).

The current media in Turkey circa 2023 is far from the pluralist side of the proposed model (Herrero et al., 2017; Simaku, 2021; Sözeri, 2013). It is instead a hybrid, shifting model changed by an authoritarian government that used media capture and other tools at their disposal, such as state subsidy of private media (Akser & Baybars, 2023). Over time, especially post-2011, the Turkish government became more illiberal and used extensive media capture methods to create favorable media (see Panayırıcı et al., 2016; Uce & De Swert, 2010). The Turkish media system is a shifting model that can be defined by three strong characteristics: a high degree of political parallelism, a polarised media with eroding journalistic professionalism, and government-captured/controlled ownership concentration supported by indirect subsidies with a strong degree of state regulatory control of media content (Coşkun, 2020; Yanatma, 2021). This model also has an important characteristic: It is an oscillating model that can enjoy periods with a relatively free press and then be a highly captured and regulated state-controlled system at other times. It is a media system that has shifted towards an illiberal stance due to media capture.

## 2.2. The Shift in Media System in Turkey

The shift in the media landscape in Turkey happened mostly through media capture. The AKP government and Erdoğan regime were able to bend the laws to their advantage to take over the media (regulatory capture) and impose restrictions on journalists (Yeşil, 2014). The economic collapse of 2001 and AKP's successful adaptation of the IMF regulatory framework allowed them to capture media outlets from business owners who opposed the AKP government or may have potentially been political rivals (Esen & Gumuscu, 2018). This happened in the case of Cem Uzan, who owned around a third of media outlets in Turkey; Uzan's newspapers and TV stations (Star) had been actively criticizing AKP and PM Erdoğan (Yıldırım et al., 2021, p. 332).

The last 20 years of the Turkish Republic have witnessed media control of dictatorial proportions (Coşkun, 2020). The intimidation tactics against media reporters and owners range from media capture to imprisonment (Eldem, 2017). Hate speech is built and spread in Turkish media along the lines of a culture war of us vs. them creating and promoting actors of oppression and victims (Arcan, 2013). Such hate speech by deployed journalists targets opposition party members, protesters of environmental and workers' rights movements, students, and workers seeking their rights (Ataman & Çoban, 2019). The institutional system of intimidation can operate top-to-bottom political coordination at the highest level (Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Merkezi/President's Communication Office) or an arm's-length through an NGO (The Pelican Group) and discreetly—such as through individual trolls being on the government payroll (Ezikoğlu, 2023). The political/informal networks of attack include the use of government-paid internet trolls who actively implement these intimidation tactics (Saka, 2018).

### 3. Qualities of the Media Shift in Turkey

#### 3.1. Political Parallelism

Hallin and Mancini present political parallelism as an indicator of a partisan press along political party lines. A media system under high parallelism would harbor a tendency to highly politicize public opinion, which may, by design, result in polarization at the ballot level (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 27). Hallin and Mancini (2004, pp. 26–33) proposed multiple indicators to assess the extent of political parallelism, some of which existed and intensified in the Turkish media system since 2011. Among them, the most prominent is the “organizational connections between the media and political organisations” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28) that AKP and the captured media have; “the tendency of media personnel to take part in political life” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28) as AKP’s embedded journalists report favorably on the government; and “journalists’ role orientation and practices” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28), which are biased towards the government. The last part is especially important as it is about how journalists view their roles in checking government power, whether it is opinion-oriented or information-oriented reporting style, which is able/unable to separate/blend commentary and information.

Researchers such as Bayram (2010) have interpreted this tendency as historical and endemic in Turkish media. The author’s holistically long-range evidence asserts that political parallelism was high during the single-party era (1930s–1940s) and progressively declined through the 1960s–1980s. However, it increased in the 1990s (Bayram, 2010, pp. 588–589). Çarkoğlu and Yavuz (2010, p. 616) explain that the level of partisanship for readers of major newspapers in Turkey is increasingly polarised due to the conglomeration and creation of government-biased media that works as a propaganda tool. Hence, once eroded, pluralism in a media system can lead to hyper-political parallelism eclipsing previous media polarization. The strengthening of one-party/one-man rule in Turkey resulted in “the decline in media independence and the emergence of an ‘advocate/partisan’ (yandaş) media” (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010, p. 617).

Furthermore, after the deregulation of media markets, newspaper owners in Turkey started to utilize the material benefits of the “patrimonial/clientelistic” relationship between media and the state through government subsidies (Yanatma, 2021). Government-friendly media outlets such as Demirören Media “have connections to obtain government contracts and concessions” in this kind of relationship (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 58–59). Hence, the Turkish media system has shifted towards increasing political parallelism after media capture. Media commercialization leads to government interference, which in turn leads to capture. As a result, the ties between media and political institutions increase (Çarkoğlu et al., 2014, p. 299).

#### 3.2. Media Capture

The conglomeration and de-unionization between 2002 and 2011 and later media capture since 2011 shifted the Turkish media system from being closer to the Mediterranean model to a transitioning/shifting media system. The query into such a shift in the Turkish media system lies in the two dimensions Hallin and Mancini (2004) mention in their work: change of market structures and state interference in how media outlets are run. The structure of media markets is about the changes after media capture that make the news-making process more favorable towards government policies. After media capture, newspaper circulation rates fell, and their opponents’ alternative social media presence exploded (Ataman & Çoban,



2023). The newspaper-readership relationship also lost its mass orientation as alternative media became the primary source of “independent news” (Akser & McCollum, 2019). New online and independent media outlets such as *T24*, *P24*, and *Gazeteduvar* attract millions of online readers daily, whereas the government-sponsored propagandist-style newspapers appeal to a more limited, polarised elite readership (Ataman & Çoban, 2023).

Turkey’s shifting media system has witnessed the state’s increasing role in using state advertising to support friendly media (Yanatma, 2021). This dimension of Hallin and Mancini’s model stresses the power of the political system in shaping the structure and functioning of a media system. As the authors state, “there are considerable differences in the extent of state intervention as well as in the forms it takes” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 41). In the Turkish case, the media system shifted towards a more negative model. Hallin and Mancini (2004) use these variables to explain such a move: censorship or other types of political pressure increases, which leads to media capture; the captured/now friendly media is endowed with economic subsidies, and those who resist experience repressive regulation. Eventually, as in the Turkish case, the state becomes the main information source and attempts to become the “primary definer” of news, as in the case of the politically motivated use of the government-owned Anatolian news agency (Irak, 2016).

The state’s role changed significantly after the policy changes of the AKP government’s post-2011 elections. The Turkish state moved from a liberal democracy and welfare state to a more repressive/authoritarian and wild capitalist state where nearly all public services are commercialized (health, school, and even defense; Esen & Gumuscu, 2018). Increasingly, the state has interfered with the free market activity of media through media capture, coercion, and repressive regulation. This move in Turkish politics also indicates the government’s attempts to control and support private media business (Sözeri, 2013; Yeşil, 2016).

Turkish media was regarded as playing an important role in the country’s long and hard road to democracy. The research into journalistic attitudes points to the desire for a more consensual than a majoritarian democracy (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). AKP and President Erdoğan built a majoritarian political system, an illiberal democracy where one party dominated the policy decisions, often bypassing the parliament and opposition parties’ recommendations (Esen & Gumuscu, 2021). The separation of power between legislative, executive, and legal branches of the state has now been erased through unlawful acts by President Erdoğan, such as not recognizing constitutional court orders, not implementing them, and insisting on legislating unconstitutional decrees (Samson & Güler, 2023). There is no longer polarised pluralism but pure polarisation at all times in a low consensus; the political system’s legitimacy is challenged by the opposition at all times, and deep cleavages within the political landscape took firm hold election after election. The media is used to polarize the opposition parties and their public supporters through culture wars (Kulturkampf; Özçetin, 2019). The reshaping of Turkey’s media through capture is indicated in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, Cem Uzan Star was the first to change hands in 2007 followed later by the sale of Doğan Media in 2018. In some cases, such as *Star* and *Haberturk*, the media changes hands twice, and in each case, to government-friendly business owners. This kind of media capture does not guarantee profits. It is also risky for business owners like Erdoğan Demirören, who had to borrow a billion USD from two government banks, a loan he was unable to pay back even after six years (Akser & Baybars, 2023).

**Table 1.** News media outlets and media capture in Turkey.

Newspaper	TV ownership/affiliation <sup>1</sup>	Ownership change <sup>1</sup>	Ideological shift
<i>Star</i>	StarTV	From Cem Uzan to Doğan Media and to Doğuş	Oppositional to pro-government
<i>Hürriyet</i>	Kanal D	From Doğan Media Group to Demirören Media (Pitel, 2018)	Neutral to pro-government
<i>Milliyet</i>	CNN Türk	From Doğan Media to Demirören Media (Bucak, 2018)	Neutral to pro-government
<i>Sabah</i>	ATV	From Bilgin/Çukurova to Çalık to Turkuvaz Media Group	Neutral to pro-government
<i>Habertürk</i>	Habertürk	Ciner Group (no change)	Neutral
<i>Yeni Safak</i>	N/A	Albayrak Group (no change)	Pro-government
<i>Sozcu</i>	SözcüTV (as of 2023)	Burak Akbay (no change, post-2013 newspaper)	Oppositional
<i>Türkiye</i>	TGRT-Fox-FoxTV	İhlas Group (no change, but FoxTV is sold and now independent/oppositional)	Pro-government
<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	N/A	Cumhuriyet Foundation	Oppositional
<i>Taraf</i>	N/A	Alkım Yayıncılık	Pro-government until 2013, changed to oppositional (closed by government decree in 2016)
<i>Zaman</i>	IrmakTV/Cihan Agency	Feza Group	Pro-government until 2013, changed to oppositional (closed by government decree in 2016)

Source: <sup>1</sup> Bayram (2010), Yıldırım et al. (2021).

### 3.3. Eroding Sense of Journalistic Professionalism

As a result of media capture, the eroding sense of journalism as a profession increased in Turkey (Liazos, 2023). We have already mentioned the potential for political instrumentalization of vulnerable journalists after media capture. The development of distinct professional norms, rules, and ethical principles, as well as whether journalists view their profession as a public service, is affected negatively after such a capture (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 33–41). As a result of this capture, the Turkish media system shifted from being viewed as more of an ethics-oriented public service to a paid profession that serves certain interests for pay. The memoirs of chief editors of the top five newspapers that changed ownership illustrate that these editors and the journalists who were fired alongside them between 2007 and 2016 had a high degree of professional ethics, integrity, and idealism (see memoirs by former newspaper chief editors Çölaşan, 2007; Dündar, 2016; Sazak, 2014). They were replaced by friendly journalists who brag about being a mouthpiece for the AKP government. Examples of such journalists include Abdulkadir Selvi (a columnist installed in *Hürriyet Daily*) or Rasim Ozan Kütahyalı, who admitted to fabricating fake news to erode trust in the opposition parties (“Rasim Ozan Kütahyalı’dan,” 2022). Most of these fired journalists later established new alternative media portals or left Turkey to continue their profession abroad more freely (Bulut & Ertuna, 2022). In Table 2 is the summary of the change in Turkish media after capture.

**Table 2.** Media Shift in Turkey.

Dimensions	Hallin and Mancini (2004) Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model	Turkeys captured and shifting media system (2024)
Newspaper/media industry	Low newspaper circulation and elite politically oriented press	Drop from high newspaper circulation to high online alternative media (Akser & McCollum, 2019) The commercial press becomes state-controlled (Yeşil, 2016) Rapid transition to broadcast and internet media (Hoyng & Es, 2017)
Political parallelism	High political parallelism, external pluralism, commentary-oriented journalism, parliamentary model of broadcast governance, and politics-over-broadcasting systems	An increase in political parallelism (Bayram, 2010) capture leads to new external and internal pluralism in the national press (İnceoğlu et al., 2020), more polarisation (Evans & Kaynak, 2015), historically oscillates between neutral commercial press and controlled/censored press (Arşan, 2013), and attempts at politics-in-broadcasting system with various degrees of autonomy and relapse into censored media (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010)
Professionalization	The instrumentalisation of journalism, once highly professionalised	Erosion of journalistic standards (Simaku, 2021) Failed attempts at institutionalized self-regulation (Liazos, 2023) Deeper instrumentalization (Ural, 2023)
Role of the state in media system	Strong state intervention, press subsidies, periods of censorship, deregulation, and strong public-service broadcasting initially	Strong state intervention but with no protection for press freedom (Farmanfarmaian et al., 2018) Press subsidies to supporters only Commercialization of broadcasting (Bulut, 2023)

As seen in Table 2, the changes in media type (from print/broadcast to digital) also coincide with the media capture in Turkey. Hence, the captured and controlled media are now legacy media, and the newly organized independent media are the more widely followed alternative media (Akser & McCollum, 2019). As political parallelism increases in the newly captured media, journalism standards go lower, and biased news leads to polarisation in the audience.

## 4. Conclusion

This article has attempted to describe a recent shift in Turkish media with reference to Hallin and Mancini's conceptualization of media systems and found it to result from increased political parallelism based heavily on media capture since 2011. We surveyed relevant literature and found that three of Hallin and Mancini's media systems concepts and analysis framework stand out in the Turkish media system shift: the increase in political parallelism, changes in journalistic professionalism (ethics), and an increased role of the state and

ownership concentration. Considering domestic political factors, we recognize that a climate of fear plays a role in successive Turkish government's efforts to control the media (Celik, 2020).

As a result of media capture, there is increased potential for biased news reporting and disinformation. We can increase the number of recent examples of biased coverage of news items by news media during the 2019 Istanbul Mayoral elections, the 2020–2021 Covid-19 pandemic (early news items included that the virus was too weak and that it did not affect Turkey, it being a nation with strong genes; Kalaycı, 2023). In one case, the online version of a news item showed a photoshopped İmamoğlu posing with Israeli PM Netanyahu to portray him negatively (such news items are later debunked by fact-checking portals such as *teyit.com*). There have been no apologies or corrections by these news outlets, even when there are court orders for them to do so. As it stands in the Turkish context, media capture leads to fake news and the winning of elections by the Erdoğan regime.

Looking at the captured media (*ATV/Sabah*, *CNN Türk/Kanal D/Hürriyet*) during election coverage since 2011, we see that these newspapers used a variety of tactics in their spreading of fake news against the oppositional candidate (Kalaycı, 2023). The erosion of journalistic standards led to the increasing use of discursive tools such as false reporting, photo-defaming, and constant hate rhetoric against political opponents of President Erdoğan. This hate rhetoric includes accusations of separatism, terrorism sympathy, Zionism, and atheism, which are used to create divisions within the electorate for political gain by these media outlets (Yılmaz & Ertürk, 2023).

In concluding thoughts, we witness that the shift in the media system in Turkey is a result of media capture. The themes selected to attack AKP's political opponents, whether it is general elections (such as Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu), presidential elections (Muharrem İnce, Selahattin Demirtaş, or Meral Akşener), or municipal elections (Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mansur Yavaş, or Tunç Soyer) do not change. They are based on the creation of imaginary shadowy enemies outside who use domestic enemies on the inside. Hence, the pejoratively used, politically incorrect accusations can range from being a coup supporter, a Zionist, dönme (a Christian convert to Islam), being un-domestic/alien, and un-patriotic/traitor (Melek & Müyesseroğlu, 2023). This accusatory tone is a prominent feature of every one of Erdoğan's us vs. them tirades under the term yerli-milli, which is local-national. Such paranoid, delusional news reporting can even take farcical tones, as in a misunderstood social media commercial on the internet ("*Ülker'in 1 Nisan reklamı*," 2017).

In conclusion, media capture is an important element in discussing political parallelism in the Turkish case. It can lead to the erosion of journalistic values and create a biased media artificially propped up by government subsidies. Turkey's politically restrictive climate has led to the development of independent online media, which are providing alternatives with increasing potential to disrupt the shift in the Turkish media system.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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